



Do the Write Thing

Canton

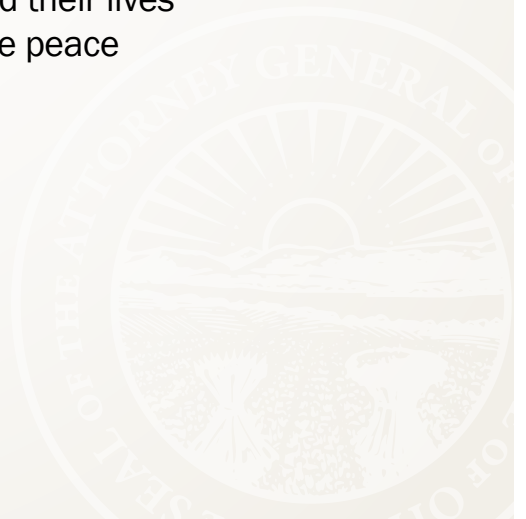


2026

Canton 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 pleased to continue our partnership with the Canton City School District for the *Do the Write Thing* program for the fifth year in a row.

Through *Do the Write Thing*, Canton’s middle-school students had the opportunity to write about violence and how it has affected their lives. As always, these students embraced the chance to share their experiences and offer ideas for a safer community.

I was so impressed by their honesty, insight, and compassion. These essays most certainly are not easy to write, and often tough to read, but the impact of their words is invaluable to our understanding and the pursuit of a more peaceful society.

I commend Canton City Schools for recognizing the importance of this program and the benefits it brings to the students, teachers, and greater community. Giving our young people a voice and truly listening to what they have to say will leave an impact on their lives that will have untold benefits in the future.

I encourage you to take time to read these essays. You will learn something, and I am confident you will come away encouraged by the next generation.



Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Yost". The signature is written in a fluid, cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

DAVE YOST
Ohio Attorney General

FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Canton City School District once again proudly participated in the annual *Do the Write Thing* Challenge. Over 950 students held group discussions with their teachers and fellow classmates about how youth violence affects them, followed by writing a personal essay or poem describing how violence impacts their daily lives. They were also asked to explore the causes of youth violence in our city and what they can do to reduce it.

In Ohio, the national program is sponsored by Attorney General Dave Yost and his staff. The Canton City School District appreciates this opportunity for our students to discuss and share their experiences and ideas in their own voices. *Do the Write Thing* provides an outlet for those who face challenges and want to resolve problems without conflict and violence. It's an initiative that will have a positive impact on all of us for years to come and a reminder that our future leaders' voices are already strong and clear, deserving to be heard.



To our students, I offer sincere appreciation for sharing your honest and raw submissions. Writing is a positive and healthy outlet to work through feelings and thoughts about personal experiences. You are already making an impact by expressing yourselves and sharing your passion and courage through these written works.

Thanks also to our teachers and staff for guiding the students in their writings. Your support and empathy for those who have bravely shared their thoughts and experiences about violence in their lives and in our community is appreciated and meaningful.

Congratulations to all of our finalists and especially to our ambassador, who will be representing us in Washington, D.C. Canton City Schools' ambassador will learn more about other perspectives on the causes and effects of violence and how we can all work together to reduce it in our community.

Sincerely,

JEFF TALBERT

Superintendent

Canton City School District

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This book contains a compilation of writings by middle-school students who were selected as the finalists of the 2026 *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 homes, 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.

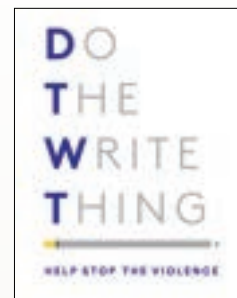
Do the Write Thing in Canton

This is the fifth year the Canton City School District has partnered with Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost for the *Do the Write Thing* program. This year, 955 seventh- and eighth-grade students across the district's three middle schools submitted their writings.

Middle-school staff from the three schools spent countless hours reading the students' submissions and scoring them with a detailed rubric. The 12 writings with the top scores were then sent to Canton's community leaders. They volunteered their time to read and score each essay. The compilation of scores determined the district's ambassador to the National *Do the Write Thing* conference in Washington, D.C.

The school district would like to thank the following community leaders for taking the time to carefully read and score each composition. Their support makes the *Do the Write Thing* program possible for our students, and their time spent investing in the future of our students is much appreciated.

- William Sherer, Mayor of Canton
- John Gabbard, Canton City Chief of Police
- Andrea Perry, Director of Public Safety
- Dr. Jennifer Webb, Chair of the Department of Education at Malone University
- Jeff Talbert, Superintendent of the Canton City School District



Do the Write Thing is the flagship program of the National Campaign to Stop Violence and has been in existence for more than 30 years. It operates programs in 29 cities in 15 states. Over the 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

GRANT ANSPACH

STEAMM Academy

Causes and Ripples

Poverty that gnaws before breakfast empty refrigerators
teaching hunger has teeth

Fathers missing like deleted scenes mothers working
doubles until love feels optional

Screens brighter than parents scrolling rage while the
algorithm whispers:

“you’re not enough yet”

Guns easier to find than mentors metal colder than a
stepfather’s stare

Abandonment dressed as freedom

“figure it out” repeated like a family motto

Bullied bodies learning violence is currency the only
language that buys respect on the block. Unseen trauma
stacked like unpaid bills ACEs score higher than report
cards, communities gutted of third places no rec centers,
no barbershops with elders, just corners waiting to become
crime scenes. Despair wearing designer labels, status
symbols on credit, self-worth rented, never owned.

And then the quiet ones, the ones who never speak the hurt
until the hurt speaks through them, in muzzle flashes, in
shattered glass, in names that become hashtags overnight

The cost is paid in many currencies:

Sons burying sons
mothers burying sons
None burying some.

Sisters who flinch at loud noises forever classrooms with
empty chairs that stay empty, neighbors locking doors at
4 p.m. instead of 9

Futures folded like old letters, never sent.

Whole generations
carrying the weight
of what was never given
to the children
who became the weapons
that no one
wanted to disarm.

Violence

ˈvɪ(ə)lən(t)s

behavior involving physical force intended to hurt, damage,
or kill someone or something.

As in: Youth Violence isn’t a laughing matter, because it’s
real for some, even if it’s joked about.

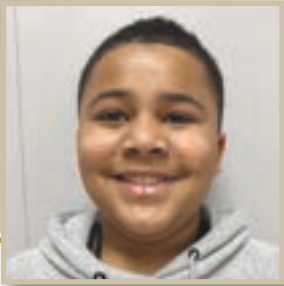
As in: Violence isn’t just an action, it’s a thought, a word, a
feeling, that spirals out of control until eventually it spills
and floods everywhere, streets, alleys, schools, homes.

As in: Violence isn’t just about those who caused it, or
who was affected, it’s the matter of how, why, even though
some people know that they were the cause and effect,
the one who put the ammunition in those weapons, not
expecting them to fire.

The Ways I’ve Seen Youth Violence

These are the ways I’ve seen Youth Violence.

1. I used to get bullied without realizing it, friends
hitting me, acting like it was fun, even though I was
uncomfortable, not feeling safe to talk to the counselor.
2. People getting bullied on my street, fighting, punching,
avoiding the police.
3. The drug house next to my house before it got
destroyed and we bought the land, in and out with
tweakers and druggies, their kids waiting outside, always
an incident, meaning I wasn’t allowed outside.
4. The kids that used to beat me until I fought back, then
pinned it on me and got me in trouble, the same ones
I’d joke with the day before.
5. The times where it wasn’t just the kids, where it was the
parents, their life, their friends, the people they didn’t
talk about, but who talked about them.



ESSAY 2

RILEY BENNETT

Crenshaw Middle School

Youth violence is a problem in schools today. The World Health Organization says, “Youth violence refers to violence that occurs among individuals aged 10-29 who are unrelated and who may or may not know each other”.

Bullying is a very big problem with teenagers. Bullying is not a good thing to do! Bullying is bad, it hurts peoples’ feelings and they might not want to go to school. Teenagers are bullying people that are in special education and different from them. It can make them feel bad about themselves because they are getting bullied by people that are not even perfect themselves. They make people feel down on themselves because they have disabilities, and they can’t help if they have a disability because they were born with it. Even outside of school, they stay in the house because they are scared they’re going to get bullied and their feelings hurt.

I think it’s not okay for people to bully others and I don’t think it’s okay because when people get bullied they are going to be not caring about anything and not talking to anybody and he is going to be scared of the people that bullied him.

Another reason people are bullied is through social media.

For example, bullies on the Internet bully people on how they look and how ugly the picture they posted was. This can affect how people view themselves. It lowers their self-confidence. It can cause them to stop posting on social media or even cause suicide.

According to the Office of Justice Programs, “The term “youth violence” covers a broad spectrum of behaviors that can include fighting, bullying, and gang-related violence”. A personal experience I have with bullying is last year there were two people in my class that got into a fight. They were fighting because one student had been making fun of the other student for being ugly and the pictures he was posting on social media. This is an example of how bullying turns into physical violence.

There are many ways to reduce youth violence. One way to reduce youth violence is to start a club at my school for victims of bullying. By starting a club you can give victims of bullying advice, help, and help them to talk to grown-ups at home or at school about what is happening. Then, the adults can do something to stop it. Another way to reduce youth violence is to teach children how to be friends with people that are different from them.



ESSAY 3

FAITH CURRY

Early College Middle School

Drowning.

A cold plunge into the water.

Once you realize what's happening, it's too late. You're drowning in your own emotions, conflicted.

Do I deserve this? Should I just not tell anyone and just suffer alone? Am I overreacting??

Then you claw at the water, screaming as water fills your mouth. No. It shouldn't be like this. You keep struggling making sounds hoping someone, anyone would hear you.

But they don't.

You're alone. No one is coming to save you. You're Alone.

But what is this? A light. A shining light beaming down on you through the murky water. It comes closer, you think this is the end? But really.....It's your best friend and some other kind people pulling you out of the water. Saving you.

What causes Youth Violence?

The causes of youth violence is usually when the bully is sometimes neglected at their home, so the only way they have to get attention is when they have to bully someone else or hurt them. It is also caused when the bully comes from a dysfunctional home and is surrounded by violence, mental health issues, drug use, and alcohol use. These things can shift a child's thinking, because at young ages we model what we see. So if everything we see is depressing, or lots of anger is expressed throughout the house, we would do the same because that is what we think is the correct action.

A quote I got from betterhelp.com is "Unresolved trauma can no longer be contained so it begins to manifest into ugly ways" I believe that this quote is a very good definition when explaining the bully's side of things.

But when the other kid is starting to get bullied studies show (from stopbullying.gov) some of the effects youth violence/bullying can give them: mental health disorders, lower grades, and suicidal thoughts.

There are a lot of disorders someone could get from bullying because the person who is getting bullied starts to think something is wrong with them or they are stupid if

someone has to pick on them. Lower grades, because of the constant bullying they start to think about what that person said to them and those thoughts start to consume the person so their grades might start dropping if they aren't completely focused on the assignment at hand. Suicidal thoughts, this does kinda go along with mental health disorders but it could just be this alone if someone is bullied. The person who is bullied might start to think to kill themselves because that might be an escape or they aren't really needed on the planet anymore and this is doing a favor to others. And this isn't true.

And mental health disorders, like self-esteem issues "with feelings of shame that can impact all aspects of a kid's lives" and this is a direct quote from stopbullying.gov and it tells how seriously it can impact someone's life. Overall, youth violence/bullying is very serious and we need to prevent it as much as we can.

A personal experience I have had with youth violence/bullying?

My personal experience with youth violence/bullying is when I was in the 4th grade and I lost all of my friends and fell into a depression. It first started when I went to a before school care that was held at the school in the morning and I only went there because my mom had to go to work early and same with my dad.

And then one day one of my friends introduced two new friends that were sisters. Everything was okay when I first met them and they seemed nice enough, but after some time being friends with the two I didn't really enjoy it cause I always was the butt of every joke, they tease me about things and I didn't really want to be teased about those things and it kinda made me feel weird about myself but I just pushed it down.

Then one day they trusted me with a secret and a non-secret, so when school started a few hours later it came to lunchtime and I told one of my different friends the non-secret because I would never tell anyone the actual secret but after I told my other friend I had a weird feeling something bad was going to happen. Not because I told my friend the non-secret, but because something else was going to happen.



So after lunch I headed to recess (cause that was after lunch) I headed outside and tried to head to my group of friends (which was the two sisters from the before school care, my other friend from the before school care, and two older kids we were all friends with) and when I walked over they told me to go away, so I just walked away.

I walked around my playground with no one to talk to or play with and I also stayed far away from them, cause at the time I was scared they were going to yell at me or something.

So for like a month or for a few weeks I talked to no one at the before school care of course, I had like one or two friends during school but it wasn't the same knowing that people hated me for no reason. And during the before school care I just read books (and that's how I started to read my favorite book series) but every time after school I just cried myself to sleep and on weekends I just stayed in bed not going anywhere and wrapped up in blankets.

But, one random day of just reading by myself at a table someone came up to me and introduced themselves to me, so I did the same and after that day we became pretty good friends. And for once I was actually feeling happy again and I could laugh, have fun and just have a good time. And not only that but I met her other friends as well, and it helped me forget about the others who didn't like me.

And after that point in my life it got even better, that same year we got a new student in my class and the teacher put his seat next to mine, and after that day we became the best of friends ever since, even to this day.

So the moral of this story is, no matter how low you are in your life, someone or some people will come around and save you from drowning in your emotions. (Also I later found out that the two sisters lied about me to the group to kick me out, they said to the others that I told the actual secret, which I didn't).

How can we end youth violence?

I believe that the best way to end youth violence/bullying is to inform parents about it and for the friends of the bully to realize what is going on, and why it is wrong to do so. Here is how we get parents to inform their children that youth violence/bullying is wrong.

First off, before a school year starts I think that the parents (if they can) attend a meeting with the staff and a few administrators. So not only could the parents meet the home room teachers but so that they could watch a PowerPoint on what youth violence is, how to prevent it, and how to see signs in their children if their child is doing that.

Secondly, parents just talk to their kids in general. Sometimes when a kid is getting bullied they don't think to tell their parents because they might not understand or they aren't comfortable with telling their parents that they are getting bullied. So if parents are regularly checking up with their kids, the kids might feel more comfortable to tell their parents that they are getting bullied.

Lastly, the friends of the bully should start to stand up for the kid who is getting bullied. Because we are doing assignments like this and the counselors of different schools come into classrooms and tell them/show them with videos why youth violence/bullying is wrong, the friend of the bully should recognize that their friend is doing something and they should tell them to stop. Of course not in all cases would this work because the bully might try to bully their friend for standing up and if it gets to that point the friend of the bully should tell someone.

At the end of the day, youth violence/bullying is a very bad thing and everyone should try their absolute best to prevent it in any way they can so we can save a lot of people from maybe getting some of the serious side effects from bullying.

ESSAY 4

LENNON BROWN

Early College Middle School

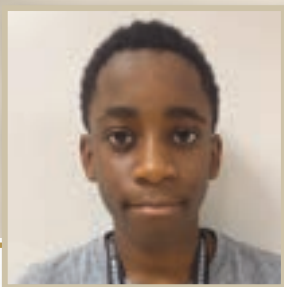


What is feels like

I wake up
 Go to school but
 kids I hate
 Here in right in front of me
 I get hurt
 But still get back up,
 I walk outside after school
 I see my friend on the ground
 I am running but still wont fix
 anything
 I see blood on the ground
 coming from him
 A knife in his chest
 Bully right next to him in cuffs
 police holding the bully hard
 But still does not fix anything,
 I go home
 parents worried,
 the bully gave me a black eye
 but still they can't help,
 they never know what is really happening
 kids around the world get bullied
 EVERYDAY
 kids always
 F
 A
 L
 L,
 on their knees,
 when they see their friend dead
 they
 S
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 A
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 R

Youth violence can happen to kids
 Very often
 When their friend dies unexpectedly
 They fall
 When their brother dies
 They fall
 When they go to funeral
 But still nothing will do
 Anything
 I go to school but it is
 Different
 No bullies but still does not fix
 Anything
 My friend gone
 My brother gone
 I'm lonely but that will still
 Not fix anything
 My life will not be the same
 Ever again
 I get older
 I'm a senior
 I see on the news
 Bully
 Out of jail
 The person who
 Murdered my friend
 Is out of jail
 Later I hear
 A big
 Loud
 Boom
 It is close
 I heard at the bullies house
 My sister is not at my house
 Worried,
 Praying,
 Hoping that she is somewhere else
 I leave the house
 Going that way

I see the bully
 Gun in hand
 And a I mourn for hours
 Seeing my sister
 On the ground
 Police sirens coming closer
 My mom pulls up
 Yelling why
 Both
 I go to the funeral but still does not fix
 Anything ever.
 I go to church
 Praying and
 Praying for a blessing
 For violence
 For kids
 God does not answer
 But still praying
 Later I leave
 I see my mom waiting
 Hoping God answers.
 Later in life
 I become a pastor
 It is Sunday
 Church started
 I see someone very familiar
 Jason Brown
 The bully
 Dressed up crying
 We meet but still does fix
 Anything he has done
 But I hear a voice
 Saying fear nothing
 I'm crying
 But I hug Jason
 And saying I
 Forgive you
 For everything.



ESSAY 5

GANEEL DEROSIER

Crenshaw Middle School

Youth violence might also be caused by cyber bullying. In this article I will talk about how youth violence could be caused.

First, youth violence could be caused by physical bullying. Physical bullying can cause youth violence by Hurting or targeting people. If a bully repeatedly targets one person and hits them, that is youth violence. Some ways you could stop bullying is by talking to the bully. You could also stop bullying by talking to your parents and teachers. Most people bully other kids because they are going through stuff and they want to vent anger but they don't know how to. So they bully other kids to feel better about themselves. This is how physical bullying is a cause of youth violence.

Second, personally youth violence has not affected my life but that could not be said for many other kids.

Multiple kids go through youth violence every single day. Some kids don't even know why they are getting bullied and that is kinda sad.

Third, you can stop youth violence by reporting it. In "tips for Youth to stop Violence" it states, "Tell someone. If you are the victim or are witness to violence, tell someone. It can be anyone you trust, such as a friend, parent, teacher, coach, brother/sisters, or a neighbor." This is stating that you can tell someone if you are getting bullied or see someone getting bullied. This is how you could stop or prevent youth violence

In conclusion, youth violence is caused by multiple things like physical bullying and mental bullying. If you ever encounter youth violence you should tell a grown up and not try to break it up because you could get caught up into it too.

ESSAY 6

JAYVONNE DUKE**Crenshaw Middle School**

Have you ever witnessed or been a victim to violence? I have and it has affected me in many ways. Violence affected my life both mentally and physically. It affected me mentally by making me feel bad for the people I witness getting hurt in any type of way. I think about the scenario constantly wondering what I could have done better to help and what I should've done rather than what I did. When I get into fights or something that physically harms me in any type of way, my mind goes blank with fear and uncontrolled thoughts and I think intrusively then regret the things I did later. This is mentally exhausting and devastating for me to think about every time I see someone go through something involving violence. Violence affected me physically just as bad as it has affected me mentally. When I get into a violent situation, most of the time I get hurt and have serious damage. There are many vulnerable places that can hurt me and I'm sure I'm also hurting others around me which is bad. Overall the violence I see and experience has a huge impact on my life and changes my personality, perspective on the world and people around me too.

There are many causes of youth violence, do you know some of them? When I see kids and teenagers fighting, being bullied or being the bully most of the time it's because of something going on at home, personal problems, false understanding conflict between two or more people or someone doing it for popularity and for fun. When teenagers and kids go home after school, they are usually overwhelmed with chores and homework. Their parents sometimes have problems that have to do with some type of mental thing. Rather it's anger issues, depression or anxiety, or something totally different, they usually take it out on their kids and those kids take it out on other children outside of home. Some kids and teenagers are dealing with personal problems themselves

and decide that it's best to take it out on other kids around them because it's the only way they can escape these issues. It could be something mental, physical, or dealing with someone else. When kids get to school, rumors can go around fast and make two or more people have physical conflicts and it leads to violence. Then after that, friends get involved and there are entire groups of people hating each other. Lastly, kids can do it for popularity when they are being bullied and don't have a lot of friends. They make conflicts then purposely fight people just so they can be known around their school or community for messing with people.

There are a few things that I and other people around me can do to prevent violence, essentially reducing it all together. We can tell adults when we see something that will eventually lead to something violent happening before it happens, we can avoid conflict with other people ourselves, we can try and talk it out with people if there are kids mature enough to do that. If we feel like the problem starts in our own homes, we can tell an adult outside of our house to help us. Lastly, we could simply mind our business. Telling an adult before something bad happens can stop it from happening at all. The two or more kids can talk it out and solve things without it leading to someone getting hurt. If you avoid creating problems with someone then nothing violent and dramatic that would get you hurt and in trouble would happen to you and others. You don't need to always involve an adult for everything when you can always solve the issue with the other person. If you are able to talk it out with another child with anything getting violent then take that chance. If you mind your business then no one would get into any trouble. Violence usually starts with rumors or someone giving unneeded advice when they don't know the situation that someone is in.



ESSAY 7

DIMAS ESCOBAR RIVERA

Early College Middle School

They circle each other early morning school,
 Their load discarded, a sense of liberation,
 Words sharpened into something cruel,
 Old hurts dragging them outside.
 Fists speak what fear won't say aloud.
 A battle between nervous novices,
 Two hearts pounding, fierce and loud,
 Mutual reluctance to back down.

What causes Youth Violence?

There are many things that can cause youth violence. Some examples are gangs that are engaged in many things or are involved in criminal activities. It can also be because of teen dating or jealousy. Bullying is a branch of youth violence and there are 3 types of bullying. The first is verbal bullying which is saying or writing mean things. The next one is social bullying which is sometimes referred to as relational bullying which involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Lastly but not the least important is physical bullying which involves hurting a person's body or possessions. All of these things can make young people feel like they don't belong and this makes some scared but they don't want to admit it. This makes young people make bad decisions or they don't think about it. They just want to get rid of that uncomfortable feeling. According to ojp.gov the impact of violence in schools extends beyond the individuals directly involved. It can also disrupt the education process and negatively affect youth and adults in the school and the surrounding community. These things shouldn't be ignored but instead it should be what adults need to pay the most attention to.

A personal experience I have had with youth violence is

This fight is what I speak of in the poem above. I remember it was early in the morning when we were lining up in front of the school. All the students were waiting for the doors to be open when suddenly two students started fighting. One student pushed the other so the other pushed him back. So the first student started

hitting the second one and he got pushed against the wall. The first one grabbed the second one and the second one dropped to the floor and he started to get kicked. The other students were just watching, including myself. No one wanted to get in a fight. Thankfully though teachers were close and they reacted quickly and stopped it.

I haven't just seen it, I've also experienced it. It wasn't as bad as a fight but it was still bullying. For some reason this girl decided to spread a rumor about me. When I heard the rumor it made me worried and wonder if people are gonna believe it or not. Thankfully though no one actually believed it and the rumor stopped quickly.

I've also seen what bullying has done to people. There was a student in school. It was during 6th grade we were on the playground and he was by himself crying because someone said some things to him so me and some of my friends went to him and comforted him and we hung out with him so he would get those things off his mind. Youth violence is not something someone should experience but yet almost everyone has experienced it. They have either felt it, or seen it, but thankfully we don't have to just watch it, we can do something about it.

How can we end youth violence?

There are many things that we can do to stop all of this violence. We can talk to kids about bullying, how it's not cool, how it affects other people, how to stand up to it, and how to tell the teachers about situations they are going through or just an adult that they trust. In addition we can also encourage kids to do what they love. Special activities, and hobbies can boost confidence, help kids make friends, and protect them from bullying behavior. This would also teach kids new skills that would help them in the future. We can also have people who have experience fighting or problems talk to young people to help them realize how serious of a problem this is. There's many more things we can do to stop all of this violence once and for all but we can't if we don't have the resources. We can come up with ideas to stop this violence and prevent unnecessary deaths. But we need more people who are aware of this and can help us stop this.



ESSAY 8

A'MANI HARPER-BYRD

STEAMM Academy

An Ode to the Violence That Stole Our Peace

Violence, you thief of innocence, You have taken what was never yours to claim

Our right to walk without fear.

Our right to exist without shame.

Violence,

Listen, my generation, listen well:

We are tired of your excuses,

Tired of your silence,

Tired of watching our sisters fall while the world turns away.

Violence,

You have made prisoners of us all.

Prisoners in our own neighborhoods

Prisoners in our own schools

Prisoners in our own skin.

But we will not bow to you any longer.

Violence

You have taught us that a skirt is an invitation,
that shorts in summer mean we're "asking for it,"

That our bodies are not our own

But we reject your twisted lessons.

We are not responsible for the eyes that hunt us,

The hands that harm us,

The voices that silence us.

Violence,

you have poisoned our nights,

Made every shadow a threat,

Every footstep behind us a warning.

You have stolen our peaceful walks,

Our therapeutic runs,

Our freedom to breathe under starlight.

Violence

from five to eighty,

none are safe from you

This is the world you have created.

But we, the youth, we see through your lies.

Violence

you have forced keychains into weapons,

turned self-defense into survival,

made our dress codes about your shame

But our anger burns brighter than your fear.

Violence

in our schools, you wear the mask of bullying,

driving children to question their worth,

their right to exist,

their reason to wake up tomorrow.

Eight-year-olds with depression,

Twenty-year-olds with scars.

This is your legacy, Violence.

Violence

hears us now,

loud and clear:

We will not inherit your hatred.

We will not pass down your poison.

We are the generation that says "ENOUGH."

Violence

we will spread kindness like wildfire,

Love like revolution,

Hope like rebellion against your reign.

This is our movement,

Our moment,

Our time to rise.

Violence,

your days of ruling us are numbered.

We are coming for you with compassion,

We are fighting you with unity,

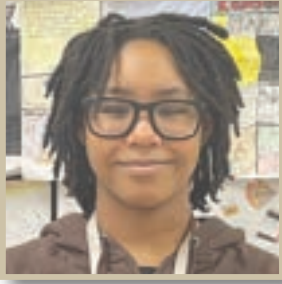
We are defeating you with the very thing you cannot understand

Our refusal to become you.

The youth have spoken.

The change begins now.

Let's do the "write" thing .



ESSAY 9

JAYLA JOHNSON

Early College Middle School

April 18, 2007, I went to school like normal. I didn't want to come home like most days because my parents are always yelling and telling me to pick a side so my friend let me come over. I come over almost every day and my friend does mind because we always have fun together but this time my friend's parents got suspicious of me. They would always ask questions and I never want to answer so I am polite and tell them what I want them to know.

"Why do you always come over?"

"What? Are you scared or something?"

"Also why don't you like going home?"

"Come on, Ace. Answer."

They kept pushing and pushing about my home life and all I could think about was answer, answer, answer but I didn't tell them much about it. This isn't like them, it's like they know something about my home life. I never told any of my friends. How would they know? I ask myself that all the time but I never get an answer. My friend started asking too. I have been acting differently but I thought it wasn't noticeable.

"Are you getting abused or something? You can tell us anything."

"Why would you think that?"

"Well you haven't come to tennis in weeks and you never want to go home. Something is up, Ace."

It's like they know everything about me. Even if I try to hide it they know something is up. I just don't want to tell them but it still hurts even if it's not physical. How do I tell them? It's easier said than done since I don't know what my parents would do if they found out I told on them.

Later I finally leave and walk home. Walking in my house made me remember how dark and sad my life is. My mom does nothing but yell and sleep and my dad is probably out somewhere. I think about my friend and my friend's parents' words and I want to tell them but I think about it more, I think about it too much but I take out my phone and call them but I hesitate. What if I get in trouble? I don't want that but I also want someone to help me. After some thinking I made the call and told them everything.

Soon the next day my parents were gone. I don't know where but they're not home, so my best guess is jail for child abuse and neglect. May 7, I started living with my friend's parents and they apologized for asking so many questions, they were worried about me. I guess that's a good reason why. I was kinda glad they asked me questions, it helped a lot. Everything was fine now thanks to them but I sometimes still wonder where my parents are and what they're doing. Are they even out of jail yet? Will they ever talk to me again? Probably not but I have better things to worry about.

Youth violence is caused by not taking care, or hurting yourself, your friends, or your children. Hurting others isn't helping anyone but it makes you feel bad and makes others feel worse. Be considerate of feelings and emotions when someone important to you needs you. Youth violence is a big cause and is very common among young people in today's society. Violence is a serious issue and if everyone just tried to stop and help those in need I think it would be less of a problem. Even if you feel like no one can help you try because trying is better than nothing. Reach out and talk to someone you trust like a trusted friend/adult, therapist, or counselor.



ESSAY 10 | AMBASSADOR

XZHAUN LYTLE

STEAMM Academy

When Childhood Breaks

Were you ever small and scared, watching fists fly like angry birds across the playground of your innocence? Did you ever taste the copper of blood on your own lips or see it bloom like terrible flowers on someone else's face? Did you ever hide in bathroom stalls, counting the seconds until recess ended, praying to gods you weren't sure existed that today would not be the day your name was called in that particular tone that meant trouble was coming?

Most of us carry these scars, invisible tattoos etched in memory. Violence writes itself into the soft pages of our youth, leaving permanent ink on stories we never wanted to tell. We are the generation that learned to flinch when doors slam, to measure safety in the distance to exit signs, and to sleep with one ear open for the sound of approaching footsteps. We learned that childhood is not always a sanctuary. We learned that being small makes you a target, being different makes you vulnerable, and being trusting makes you prey.

Each morning, the sun rises on twelve empty beds. Twelve breakfast tables where no child will ever sit again. Twelve backpacks hanging by doors that will never be shouldered. Twelve alarm clocks that will never need to wake anyone. These are twelve sets of parents who will dress for funerals instead of attending parent-teacher conferences, opting for caskets over college applications.

The Sandy Hook Promise counts them: twelve children silenced by gunfire, their laughter cut short like songs interrupted mid-verse, their futures erased like chalk on blackboards wiped clean by trembling hands.

Thirty-two more will bleed today. Their bodies are learning pain they were never meant to know, while mothers pace hospital corridors and fathers weep into their hands, wondering if they could have built higher walls or locked stronger doors. Thirty-two children will go to bed tonight with bandages instead of bedtime stories. Some will recover physically but carry emotional wounds like shrapnel in their souls; metal fragments of trauma that will set off alarms for the rest of their lives whenever they try to pass through the security checkpoints of trust.

In America, bullets have become the leading cause of why children never grow up. The statistics are staggering, but behind each number is a name, a face, and a story that will never reach its conclusion.

One in ten gun deaths belongs to someone who hasn't even learned to drive yet someone who still believes in tooth fairies and draws stick figures of their family holding hands under a smiling sun. These children die before they understand the finality of goodbye. Some are five years old, not knowing the real monsters walk among us in daylight, wearing familiar faces.

These monsters don't have fangs or claws. They look like neighbors, teachers, or friends. They smile at potluck dinners, and no one suspects the darkness they carry. Children are snatched from their homes like wolves stealing lambs, torn from parents who thought love was armor enough. These children disappear into nightmares made real, into basements and backrooms where screams echo, and no one comes running.

Why do we hurt the innocent? Why do we take the soft clay of a child's trust and crush it in our fists? These questions hang in the air like smoke from extinguished candles on cakes that will never be cut.

Between 2000 and 2017, demographics danced their tragic mathematics while violence continued its relentless harvest. These numbers represent dreams deferred, drying up like raisins in the sun. Each percentage point is a classroom that will never be full, a wedding that will never happen, a grandparent who will never hold a grandchild.

Communities crumble under the weight of too much grief. Neighborhoods that once buzzed with play fall silent. Families shatter like glass thrown against concrete; the pieces are so sharp that even trying to gather them draws blood. Fear moves in like a permanent resident, boarding up the windows of trust and installing security cameras in the heart.

In school hallways, bullies sharpen their cruelty into weapons. They learn early that power can be taken by force and that breaking others can make them feel temporarily whole. These young predators often began as prey,



discovering it is better to be the one throwing punches than receiving them.

One in five LGBTQ+ youth has stared down the barrel of hatred, been threatened or injured on property that should be a sanctuary. They walk through halls where their very existence is considered a provocation. They learn to edit themselves, to hide who they are, and to exist in the shadows because the light makes them too visible to those who would do them harm.

Too many suffer in silence, their cries for help lost in the noise of a world too busy to listen. They become victims of a trinity of torment: bullying, violence, and depression.

Bullying creates the wound.

Violence deepens it.

Depression infects it until it festers.

The teasing starts small. Words thrown like stones. “Freak,” “loser,” “stupid,” words that burrow into

developing minds and become the internal voice of self-hatred. Then come the rumors, spreading like wildfire through social media, consuming reputations in digital flames. The internet never forgets; it stockpiles screenshots like grenades to throw for maximum damage.

Finally, bodies become battlegrounds. Hitting, kicking, and punching turn human contact from comfort to cruelty. Blood flows like red ink, writing stories of dominance on tender skin. Broken noses heal crooked, and scars form maps of battles fought in places that should have been safe harbors.

But the physical wounds are often easier to treat than the invisible injuries that infect the soul. These invisible wounds don’t show up on X-rays or heal with band-aids. To heal the heart and stop the cycle, we need to stand up, speak out, and “Do The Write Thing.”



ESSAY 11

ADONIS LUCIUS

STEAMM Academy

Violence is when kids start yelling in the hallway,
and everybody crowds around to watch.
I just stand there, hoping it ends soon.
It makes my stomach twist,
even though I'm not part of it.
Violence is at the basketball game,
when people get too mad over losing.
One minute it's just trash talk,
the next, someone's throwing punches.
It's crazy how fast fun can turn into a fight.
Violence is on my phone too.
I saw a video of someone getting shot by the police.
It didn't feel real
but it was, and that stuck with me.
I think it starts when we stop listening,
when we try too hard to act grown,
when we forget what respect really means.
But I can do my part.
I can listen,
stay out of trouble,
and choose peace instead of anger.
Violence is loud.
Peace is quiet
but that quiet feels better to me.

ESSAY 12

JULIA SICA AJANEL

Early College Middle School



Youth violence is something many young people see or live through. It can happen at school, in the neighborhood, online, or even at home. For me, violence has had a real impact on my life. It has made me more careful about who I trust and where I go. Sometimes it has made me feel stressed or worried, even when nothing is happening at the moment. Seeing people my age fight, argue, or hurt each other has shown me how fast things can get out of control. It has also made me want better for myself and the people around me.

There are many causes of youth violence. One big cause is the environment young people grow up in. If someone sees fighting at home or in their community, they might start to think it's normal. Another cause is peer pressure. Some teens feel like they have to act tough or join in on bad behavior just to fit in. Social media can also make things worse by spreading drama, threats, or rumors. Lack

of support is another reason. When young people don't have someone to talk to or a safe place to go, they might turn to anger or violence to deal with their feelings.

Even though youth violence is a big problem, there are things I can do to help reduce it. I can choose not to take part in drama or fights. I can walk away instead of trying to "prove" something. I can also speak up when I see someone being bullied or treated badly. Being kind and respectful to others can make a bigger difference than people think. I can also focus on my goals and surround myself with people who want to do better. When I take care of myself and stay calm, I help create a safer space for others too.

Youth violence affects many lives, including mine. But by understanding the causes and choosing better actions, I can help make my community safer. Change starts with small choices, and I want to be part of that change.





Do the Write Thing 2026

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Do the Write Thing *Cleveland*



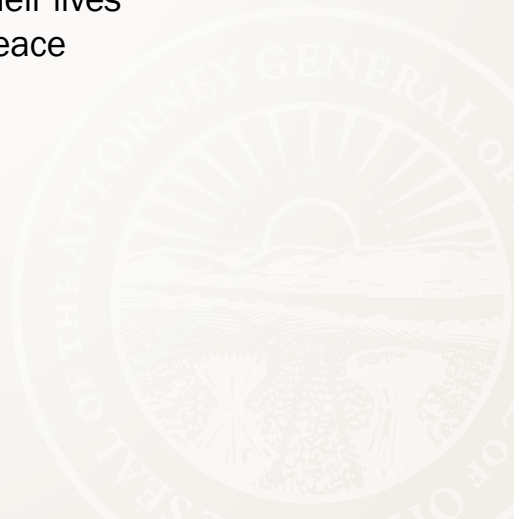
2026

Cleveland Metropolitan 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 pleased to continue our partnership with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District for the *Do the Write Thing* program for the second year in a row.

Through *Do the Write Thing*, Cleveland's middle-school students had the opportunity to write about violence and how it has affected their lives. As always, these students embraced the chance to share their experiences and offer ideas for a safer community.

I was so impressed by their honesty, insight and compassion. These essays most certainly are not easy to write, and often tough to read, but the impact of their words is invaluable to our understanding and the pursuit of a more peaceful society.

I commend Cleveland Metro for recognizing the importance of this program and the benefits it brings to the students, teachers, and greater community. Giving our young people a voice and truly listening to what they have to say will leave an impact on their lives that will have untold benefits in the future.

I encourage you to take time to read these essays. You will learn something, and I am confident you will come away encouraged by the next generation.

Yours,



DAVE YOST
Ohio Attorney General



FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Dear Students,

I want to take a moment to congratulate and thank you for your participation in the *Do the Write Thing* program. Your willingness to share your thoughts, experiences, and ideas through writing is truly inspiring.

By taking part in this program, you have used your voice to bring awareness to the impact of violence and to explore ways to make a positive difference in your community. Writing is a powerful tool, and through your words, you have not only expressed yourself but also contributed to an important conversation about change.

I hope this experience has helped you see the strength in your voice and the impact that your ideas can have on the world around you. Your words matter, and I encourage you to continue using them to stand up for what you believe in, inspire others, and create the future you want to see.

Thank you for your hard work, dedication, and courage. I am so proud of you and excited to see all the amazing things you will accomplish!



With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dr. Warren G. Morgan II". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underlining the name.

DR. WARREN G. MORGAN II
Chief Executive Officer
Cleveland Metropolitan School District

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This book contains a compilation of writings by middle-school students who were selected as the finalists of the 2026 *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 homes, 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 Cleveland

This year, the second at Cleveland Metropolitan School District, the *Do the Write Thing* program reached over 445 students across 12 participating schools, demonstrating a strong commitment from both educators and students to engage in conversations around violence prevention and community healing.

The *Do The Write Thing* Campaign is more than a writing exercise — it is a platform for empowerment, awareness, and action. CMSD held three rounds of Community reader events to score essays and help determine a top 10. A distinguished reader event, read and scored the top 10 to select the top finalist, who will attend the Youth Violence Conference in Washington, D.C. along with a parent and teacher.

By listening to and uplifting student voices, we take an important step toward building safer, more supportive communities.



Do the Write Thing is the flagship program of the National Campaign to Stop Violence and has been in existence for more than 30 years. It operates programs in 29 cities in 15 states. Over the 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

MARCELINE AMOS-HERNANDEZ

Riverside School



Scared

Sitting in my home,
Although im not alone
I still get scared hearing noises;
Including my neighbors' loud voices.
When I hear a boom,
Loud in my room,
I don't assume fireworks.
I think of the evil that lurks.
In the dark,
In the park.
I think of guns,
And people's sons.
Will I end up like that too?
Will it happen to me?
Or maybe even you?

Do wrong

Maybe those who do wrong,
Have never heard a happy song,
Or gotten to eat dinner with their family.
What if there was rarely any presents
under the tree?
Maybe they grew up without a home,
Nowhere to call their "safe zone."
What if people hurt them,
even back when they were younger
than ten?

They might've never had a bed,
Maybe someone they loved is dead.
There's many reasons why this could be,
Most of them we can't see.
Not everyone is just plain evil,
Often times there's reasons that won't
appeal
To the public eye.
All some want to do is cry
About things that don't matter.
They ignore things wilder than the
mad hatter,
like the fact that children have access
to weapons.
that is something that threatens
Everyone's safety
Almost daily.
Don't be like them.
Put this to an end!
Don't just stand there,
Running your hands through your hair.
Make a change
Don't be the same

Careful

We can't change how others act
That would be quite the task
But we can change how we react

That's not too much to ask
Standing there means you're the
problem too
Not helping puts you in a bad place
Here's how to handle it if you don't
know what to do
But remember helping isn't a race
Tell an adult
Or tell the authorities
Go ahead and bolt
To tell someone your priorities
If you're caught in between
Be careful what you do
Let out a scream
And hopefully someone will come
to you
If that's not the case
Try your best to handle it
If you're in a bad place
Please don't scramble it
If weapons are involved
I recommend you run and hide
Things like that can't be solved
But just speaking your mind
If its online
Tell someone you trust
Its bad to commit a crime
Lets turn violence into dust



ESSAY 2

CYRRD GAMBLE

Miles School

Abusive relationships: On Young Boys Point of View

How do young men feel in abusive relationships?

In relationships we always hear about what the men are doing to women, but have we ever thought women can sometimes be the problem? Sometimes women can be the reason a relationship is toxic. Sometimes women have something over the man making them think they cannot leave in Ohio. I found in the Ohio Domestic Violence Network database, in abusive relationships, out of the 157 relationships reported, 82 men have died and 75 women have died.

My friend Daniel got into a relationship with a girl named Daisy. It was fine, then suddenly he stopped texting. Then he stopped getting onto the game. He did this to spend time with Daisy. Everything he once did with us, he stopped. Daniel was not the same person anymore. Then we started getting text from Daisy about him. She started to talk about him behind his back. We showed him the texts, but he would not listen to us. I think he did not leave Daisy sooner because he thought it was normal. He also was

getting snappy at us because she was manipulating him into thinking we were the problem, and not her.

It got so bad he wasn't talking to us for weeks. One day, we called him in our friend's group chat to discuss it. We gave him texts and valid points, eventually Daniel blocked Daisy. She was spamming his phone, then she spammed my phone until it stopped. After all that drama he stopped dating for a long time. We all know that he is doing much better now.

There are effortless steps to prevent this. We can asked boys or men about their relationships. We can be there for them. Let them know if it is ok to tell us what is wrong. We could also confront those terrible women who treat their boyfriends bad. We could also get evidence on those women or tell people publicly what is going on. These are a few things I would do to help men who are in an abusive relationship.

If could give a message to my community it would be that sometimes men need support from being in an abusive relationship.





ESSAY 3

EVELYN GARCIA-TOHOM

Scranton School

Violence, the answer to more problems

I was only about 6 when I learned to recognize the sound of a gunshot. I still remember the first time I heard a gun go off. Well, the first gunshot I was able to tell was a gunshot. I was in my parents' room, lights off, near the window, covered in blankets and watching some silly cartoon when I heard a sharp, echoing "CRACK". At first, I didn't react. It was around the Fourth of July then, so I just thought they were fireworks. I looked out the window to see an empty night sky. That's when I realized, that was not a firework. I rushed downstairs to where my family was eating dinner and asked what that sound was. They explained that it was a gun, not a firework. When I tell you that I rushed upstairs to shut the blinds on the window and turned on the lights because I was so scared, you'd better believe me. That night I lay awake thinking, "Why would someone willingly hurt someone else? Why carry something that could hurt other people? How could anyone look at someone else in the eyes and shoot them? What's the need for a gun or violence of any type?" I had so many questions running through my head, questions I wanted answers to because I genuinely couldn't understand. Now that I'm a few years older, I finally understand why someone would use violence, but that doesn't mean it should be justified or persuaded. Since that night, I've seen at least 2 more-gun related incidents in my neighborhood, just a few houses down from where I live. Three-gun related incidents sounds like such a small number, compared to other people's experiences, but that's three more incidents than necessary, three more incidents that shouldn't have happened. Three more incidents in which people have been hurt/killed, added on to the many more happening all around the world. In every region, every time zone, every place, every climate or weather or event. There are people losing their lives, their families and friends, relatives or pets, coworkers even, to guns every day. It's reported that every year, an average of 250,000-300,000 people a year die because of gun violence. All those deaths include homicides, suicides, and accidents. Those are at least 250,000 people mourning the loss of a loved one, a mother, father, son, daughter, best friend,

co-worker, girlfriend, boyfriend, wife, husband, etc. That's considering that each of the deceased had at least one associate, which many probably had more than one person waiting for them at home. Imagine that, someone's wife plated her husband's food at the dinner table, sat their kids down, fed them, put them to bed, and went to sleep herself, thinking her husband was working overtime and forgot to tell her, just for her to wake up the next morning, turn on the news and finds out about a shooting. She then looks at the cold, untouched food and everything starts to click in her head. Her husband is never coming back. She's going to have to provide for her children all by herself, their children will grow up fatherless, trying to fill the void in their hearts that their father left when he died. You know what the sad part is? It's that none of that would happen if humans weren't as evil as to use violence to get what they want. Approximately 20% of all homicides in the U.S. are revenge driven homicides. Revenge homicides can stem from arguments, disagreements, and revenge. As I see it, it's a never-ending loop. Someone does something, they want revenge, they get it, then the other person also wants and gets their revenge, and it doesn't stop until it leads to someone getting hurt. Does anyone understand?!?! Violence leads to more violence. As long as violence responds with violence, no one will ever truly be safe. Make your house bulletproof, board up your windows, reinforce your walls, do all that you want but as long as violence is present, you'll never be safe. I can't stress that enough. Violence is a huge problem in our current day world. I'm glad numbers of gun violence are deteriorating, but violence itself never ceases. I can't express how much rage I feel when I hear news of someone getting shot or killed unnecessarily over the smallest of things. It's sad how someone's little bruised ego can cause such sentences as death. It's sad how sometimes people are told to kill or harm just to keep their families safe. I understand why someone would kill, but it doesn't justify that. Nobody should have to kill to stay alive. And I find that quite conflicting, because I know that if my family were held at gun point, I would also kill for them. It's the complicated feelings that lead to the ugliest actions. Sadly, there are many kinds of violence, physical abuse, mental,



psychological, torture and other kinds. I focused more on gun related violence, since that is what I've heard of too often. However, I do want to make it aware that gun violence isn't the only violence, and that people do have other motives to harm other than just revenge or emotions. Violence will always just influence more violence.

***Note:** I am aware that I didn't follow the original prompt, but as I was writing words just started flowing and I found myself writing not for a grade or

approval, if not the need for anyone to understand the problem that violence poses. I cannot stress how much I wish to single handedly be able to abolish violence. I wish I could do something, anything, but because I am merely a child, I don't hold that power. All I can do is talk. Try to make people see how their bad actions come to influence their future. I'm sorry if I didn't follow the prompt, but I'm not submitting anything else. I wrote this late at night out of frustration of ICE murders and violence overall. *



ESSAY 4

VICTORIA GEE

William Rainey Harper School

From a study done by the Office of Justice Programs in 2018, ages of 12-14 were more likely to be victims of assault than ages 15-17 were. Sadly, youth violence is everywhere and it harms everybody in many different ways. Youth violence can be seen in ways like domestic violence, gun violence, bullying, physical or emotional violence, and more. Youth violence is caused by many different reasons, but starts when people who cause violence witness violence themselves, making them think that violent behavior is okay. There are so many ways to reduce violence too, but everyone needs to work together to help bring an end to youth violence. How can you help reduce youth violence?

On my behalf, I can say that I have been personally impacted by youth violence. Youth violence has affected me and my loved ones, with each violence having a different impact. I know that some violence has directly changed some of my loved ones' lives. But for myself, I have had some violence impact me, even if it doesn't seem like a big deal. For example, worrying about violence (including gun violence, bullying, etc) in my community is something I feared ever since I can remember. Violence has made me feel unsafe everywhere I go. I've always been worried about violence harming me or people I care for. It's truly upsetting to know that this isn't rare, that others have experienced violence and that most people have experienced some sort of violence in their lifetime, usually even before they are an adult. Or that some people have been worried about violence since they were born because of seeing it so often in their neighborhood. Nobody should ever have to worry about their own safety from violence in their community or in general. People from around the world are living in fear because violence is everywhere and can harm them at any time, even when you least expect it.

Another example of youth violence is that I've once been in a toxic friendship before when I was around 10 years old. They controlled everything I did and who I hung out with. They would deny how they made me feel and would be upset if I were ever mad at them. They would threaten me that if I got mad at them, they would stop being friends with me, and at the time, that was the only friend I had. I would go home after-school and think about what I did wrong to make them upset at me. It was a one-sided friendship and they wouldn't acknowledge my side of the story. Once I started making new friends, they would become friends with my new friends

and then leave me out on purpose. After a while, I luckily was able to end that friendship, but sometimes I still feel down whenever I remember the fun times we had together, and those good memories are what kept me in that toxic relationship for longer than I wanted it to be. That friendship is an example of emotional violence, even though it wasn't necessarily violent. Emotional violence is when a person uses non-physical actions like words to hurt your feelings, make you feel bad about yourself, scare you, or be manipulative over you. Emotional violence can even grow into physical violence or more. Violence is more than just physical violence, you may be affected by violence without even knowing it because violence can be defined by so many different types.

There are plenty of causes to youth violence, some can be the financial stability of their families, the neighborhood and environment they were born and raised in, the people they hang out with, witnessing violence from a young age (such as being a victim of child abuse or domestic violence), and so much more. Unfair conditions where children aren't feeling heard or loved, not getting their basic needs met, struggling, getting bullied, seeing violence happen to their loved ones or themselves, and etc are some more reasons youth violence can start. There is also a saying, "Hurt people hurt people." That saying shows how people who have seen violence or been a victim of it will go on hurting others because they believe it's normal or they could also believe that others should go through that pain too. When you expose children to violence, they can potentially take part in violence later on in their lives. Children will do whatever they are taught, so if a child is taught some sort of violence, like hitting your partner and abusing them, they will believe that it is okay behavior whenever they eventually have their own partner later on in life. In short, if they are never taught that violence is wrong, they will never believe violence is truly wrong. In some instances, children who engage in violence do understand that violence is not okay, but they could also be violent because of their pain from experiencing it, so they are violent to others to ease their pain. Violence should never be normalized, because violence can sometimes result in permanent damage to people's lives, such as making them mentally or physically hurt, ruining their image, changing how they behave, or sometimes can even end people's lives completely. Though this does not excuse violence or make violence okay whatsoever, it shows that violence can be described as a virus,



it spreads from person to person and continues affecting more and more people.

As a middle-schooler, I can help in a few different ways. One of the most important ways is not engaging in any youth violence myself and telling adults if I see any youth violence taking place in my community or in my school. By not engaging in violence myself, I can make sure that I don't hurt people that could then also continue the violence chain by also engaging in another source of violence. I can also help by raising awareness on how youth violence needs to be stopped, such as advocating that youth violence is negatively impacting our generation. I can help raise money by doing fundraisers and donate the money to foundations that help stop violence by helping the victims and talking to the person who caused something violent to help understand why they did it and stop that behavior. I'm also able to speak up about the violence and do research on the different types and causes of violence so that others can learn about youth violence to help prevent it. Educating others about youth violence can help them identify if they know anybody or they themselves are experiencing violence so that those victims of violence can go get the help that they need. This can help people protect themselves if they know that they are a victim of violence, and since they know different types of violence, they can then even protect themselves from less known violence that isn't talked about as much (such as emotional, psychological, sexual, etc, violence). Writing an essay to bring

awareness, like this one, can also be a way to help stop youth violence. There are endless possibilities and ways that you can also help reduce youth violence in your communities. But something that is needed to stop youth violence is that we all need to work together to stop violence in our community. Not only a few people can stop violence, they can reduce it, but it'll most likely be a very difficult task and/or take a very long time. If we work as a team, we can reduce youth violence more effectively in our community. Youth violence can be reduced in so many ways, but it takes more than one person to make a change in our community. Youth violence is continuing to increase, which is horrible knowing the ways violence affects people, the reasons violence is growing, and all the ways that people can help stop it. The Council on Criminal Justice states, "Juvenile-perpetrated homicides were 65% higher in 2022 than in 2016, increasing from 315 homicides in 2016 to 521 homicides in 2022. Compared to other violent offenses, homicide experienced the largest percentage change during that period." This shows how youth violence is ending children's lives early when they have so much more to live for and experience. Youth violence needs to be stopped before it keeps on affecting more and more people. Youth is our future and we need to protect and raise them to make our world a better place. What are you going to do to stop youth violence in your community? Take action now by making a change about violence, one step at a time.



ESSAY 5

ALEXANDRIA HALL

William Rainey Harper School

Stop the Violence

Why is it so important to talk about youth violence? Violence is a serious thing that some kids have to endure or see every day. It doesn't matter what kind of violence it can be: domestic violence, gun violence, physical violence/assault, emotional/psychological abuse, verbal abuse, bullying, gang violence, dating violence, and physical fighting. Also, many kids our age don't like to speak up about violence that they have to go through or see because they are embarrassed.

Youth violence is caused by many things, but a few of the main things that cause it are peer pressure, bullying, and uncontrollable emotions.

In my community and school, youth violence has affected us as scholars and kids outside of school. It has also changed the way that a lot of kids feel and think about going to school. We have to practice lockdown drills a lot in order to be prepared. While lockdown drills are meant to protect us, they also make students aware and sometimes fearful about something possibly happening. For some kids, they don't feel like school is a place where they can fully relax and focus on education and getting work done, they often worry about bad things happening. From 1999-2025, the percentage of school shootings per year is 55% for high school, 22% for middle school, 16% for elementary school, and this is just an estimated amount.

Youth violence can sometimes affect us emotionally. Like, hearing about fights or serious problems with kids around our age, which can cause stress and fear. Some kids become very quiet and distant, while others may start to change their attitude towards people and their emotions. It can become very hard to focus on one thing, like school work, for example, when kids are worried about problems or safety. Even though these feelings may not be seen by some, it still has a strong impact on how we kids treat each other and how we present ourselves. Also, youth violence has created a lot of tension about how cautious we are of who we are with and what we are. Around 8 to 15 percent of schools per year have fights involving the youth.

There are many reasons why youth violence happens. One major cause of violence is peer pressure. Many kids want to fit in and be accepted to be in friend groups or to just be one

person's friend. Sometimes this can cause people, especially kids, to make poor decisions or follow others even when they know it is wrong. The pressure to feel like you have to be tough or popular can lead to violent situations. Also, peer pressure can turn into kids getting in trouble with law enforcement and could possibly make them join gangs. Such as being threatened to get killed if they don't join the gang. Around 90% of teens report their experience with peer pressure.

Bullying is another major cause of youth violence. Things such as hurtful words, teasing, and bullying can cause a lot of emotional pain. Social media can have a big impact and make bullying even worse because problems can spread more quickly. Sometimes social media can even be used to leak things such as people's personal information, which can be very dangerous for that person. Arguments or bullying that start online can start to become a problem at school, which can bring other people into the situation. So then sometimes, depending on whether it is the bully's friend or not, the other kid might feel like they are getting tag-teamed. To whereas, if it is someone who is trying to stand up for the kid, the bully might feel defeated. When kids feel embarrassed, they may start to feel angry or sad because rumors have been spread or people are saying hurtful things about them.

Another cause of youth violence is not knowing how to control strong emotions. Some kids deal with stress. This stress can be due to many things, such as homework, school work, sports, or feeling ignored by everyone. When kids do not have a healthy way to get support or express their feelings, anger, and frustration can build up. So, instead of them expressing or talking to someone about their emotions, it can turn violent, and the kid can take it out on the wrong people. Violence can often become a reaction to pain rather than a solution to emotions or problems. All of these emotions can make a kid feel trapped and not know what to do. So, finding good ways to handle emotions, like talking to a counselor or playing sports, might help prevent something violent from happening.

Even though I am only in middle school, I believe that I can still help reduce youth violence in my community. One important thing I can do is choose to be kind and respectful. Showing that you can be respectful even during arguments will help prevent conflicts from getting super serious. Doing



small things like listening to others and choosing not to spread false information about the person can make a huge difference for a lot of people. Showing people that you can solve problems peacefully and keep self-control can help others to do the same. I can help the younger kids out, who are feeling ignored or alone. Also, telling a trusted adult what is going on can be very helpful to defuse a situation, depending on what it is.

Another way that I can help is by standing up for others who feel like they can't defend themselves. Oftentimes, when students are bullied or left out, they feel alone. By speaking up, offering help, or including them, I can help create a safer environment for everyone around. Being an upstander and not a bystander can show that violence and bullying are not acceptable. Another thing is that being an upstander instead of a bystander can really show how you feel about the situation, and how you are trying to keep yourself, while also keeping others around you safe. That really matters because a lot of people don't stand up to bullies because they are afraid of the bully, so stepping in makes a big difference.

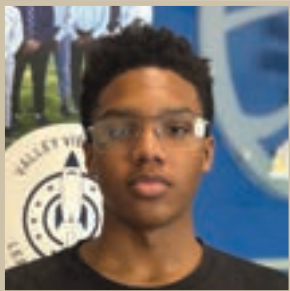
Youth violence is a serious problem, but that can change. We can try to reduce youth violence. Change will not happen all at once, or by one person, we have to work together in order for change to happen. Change begins when we, as scholars/youth, make good choices and treat others with respect. Even as a seventh grader, I believe that my actions matter anywhere I am, whether I am at home or at school. If more students started choosing kindness, not anger, and speaking up over silence, our school and community can become a safe place for everyone around us, including ourselves.

One last thing that I would like to add is a way that youth violence has affected me and people around me. One way that youth violence has affected people in my community is that a few years ago, there was a 13 year old who got shot about ten-fifteen minutes away from our school. That is really scary because that is kind of close to our school, and I'm hoping that this doesn't happen to anyone in my community, because I don't wish this upon anyone. Also, one way that youth violence has affected me, even though this was like

20 years ago, so before I was born, my dad lost his brother to a stabbing. My dad's brother said something that the guy didn't like, so his first instinct was to fight, and he ended up getting stabbed. He is no longer here because of what happened, which is sad, that these things are happening, and now my dad has to live with that pain for the rest of his life.

In conclusion, all of these facts can show how many things can cause youth violence, and it doesn't just have to be fighting. One thing that many students or youth forget is that not everything needs to be solved with violent actions or words. Situations should be able to be talked out instead of us going right to hurting someone else, because not only can it get you in trouble, but depending on how badly you hurt them, they could be injured forever, they could die, and it can affect many people in the community. Youth violence is very sad because almost every day there is a new news story about a kid getting shot, stabbed, or killed in some way.

This is very sad because most of them are around my age, thirteen or fourteen, and they don't even get to achieve what they wanted to in life because of one simple thing that could have been prevented or talked out.



ESSAY 6

ZAHIR HARDY

Valley View Boys' Leadership Academy

Watch Your Surroundings

This story is fictional

It was the start of the summer and Alexia Reinhart just got out of school with her friends Oliva and Lucy. Alexia invited her friends to her house to play games on their phone. Then, Lucy said that they should watch out for who they play with. Oliva also agreed with Lucy's statement. Alexia thought they were joking, but she also did take them a little seriously. After a while Alexia and her friends finished playing games.

After Oliva and Lucy left Alexia's house and Alexia started to think about what Lucy said. Alexia's parents came back home and had dinner. They asked her how her day and she was told the "I was good, but Lucy said that I should be careful about who I talk to." Her parents looked at each other and then looked at Alexia. They said that she should really listen to what Lucy said because it is dangerous for young people, especially young girls. After, dinner Alexia really thought what her parents and Lucy said.

When her parents went to sleep, she played her father's game. Then, she started to play a game called "Roblox." While she was playing this game, she met a person online. They started having fun with each other and becoming friends. So even though her parents said be careful, Alexia paid no mind. Then, the stranger asked Alexia what her name was and she said, "Alexia what's yours" and the stranger said, "My gamer is Sickgamer229 and now that we

are friends, do you want to meet up" and Alexia said yes.

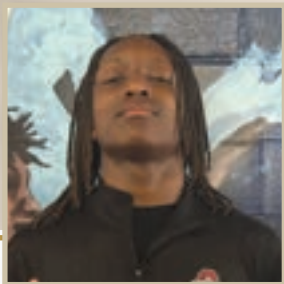
After 5 days of planning this meet up Alexia and Sickgamer229 decided to go to the park. Alexia did not tell anyone where she was going because she thought that she would be safe and not harmed at all. But Alexia would soon learn that she should pay attention to what people say and always think about it.

The first one to arrive at the park was Alexia. She waited and waited but Sickgamer229 was a no-show. After a couple of hours Alexia was about to leave until she heard a voice that sounded familiar. The voice that she had heard was Sickgamer. It was calling her from the woods. She ran as fast as she could to see the face of the boy but to her surprise, it was a large man.

Do you think that Alexia will be safe or is she in danger?

As we see in the story, Alexia was unsafe; she did not listen to what her parents and friends said. This can also happen in real life. On the website [usssc.gov](https://www.usssc.gov) it says that of the 61,678 cases reported in fiscal year 2024, 1,430 involved sexual abuse. Sexual abuse offenses have increased by 62.5% since fiscal year 2020. This type of violence is caused by adults. The reason I say this is because one, adults can control who the children talk to, and they can also teach their children how not to talk to strangers. We can stop this violence by paying attention to what our friends and family say because it can sometimes save our lives.





ESSAY 7

PIERRE LOVE JR.

Valley View Boys' Leadership Academy

The one day that can change your life

Based on a true story

Watching my friends make that one decision that can change your life

“Ding dong ditch” into a scene of shattered glass, police chases, and terrifying violence in our own park has been a massive wake-up call.

Youth violence isn't just a headline anymore, it's happening right here, ruining potential before it even begins.

It is exhausting and frightening to see people I know turn to violence, making me, and many others in our generation, feel deeply disappointed and afraid to even go outside.

This type of violence stems from a combination of risk factors: the thrill seeking, underdeveloped teenage

brain that ignores long term consequences, intense peer pressure, and a lack of proper supervision.

When combined with easy access to alcohol or drugs, a “prank” quickly escalates into a life altering tragedy. To fix this, we have to take responsibility.

Personally, I am learning to be careful about who I surround myself with, choosing friends who don't engage in reckless behavior.

Together, we need to create safer, positive spaces like better sports leagues and engaging after-school programs that keep young people off the streets.

We need to support mental health services that help teens manage anger and trauma, and most importantly. We need open, honest dialogues between adults and teens to stop these dangerous, impulsive choices before they become fatal.





ESSAY 8

ATHENA LIPSCOMB

Luis Muñoz Marin Dual Language Academy

How Suicide Affects the People Around You

Suicide is a huge problem in Cleveland. My essay will focus on ways suicide can be avoided, why suicide is developing in young adults, and how I believe suicide can be avoided in the future.

In 2022-2023, many people under the age of 30, have committed or attempted suicide in Cleveland, Ohio. Many of which were spikes of committed suicides going as high as 44% in that same year. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for people as young as 10 years old in the Cleveland area.

I believe that suicide affects our communities more than we realize. Leaving many people feeling empty and restless when a family member commits. When a family member dies, it can be very emotional and devastating for the rest of the family. Knowing that they willingly ended their lives can hurt families way more. It leaves many people like friends and family feeling quite guilty and confused since most suicide victims don't speak out about their problems or about how they are feeling. When they do try to approach people about their issues they try to tread lightly or are not 100% straight forward. This makes the people who used to hang around them feel as if they were too late to act or make them think "How come I didn't notice?". Unfortunately, when parents or friends start to notice change in their loved one, they take their problems lightly and then everything clicks when it's too late and they actually pass on.

I believe that there are ways to prevent our young people from thinking in these unhealthy ways and keep them safe so that they can live good, long-lasting lives. I have never experienced suicidal thoughts myself, but a portion of my friends have and have self-harmed.

Marie was young, and she had many problems going on in her life. Family issues, toxic relationship dynamics, and lastly, on top of that, she was going through the loss of her older brother. All these things going on at the same time made her feel extremely emotionally drained. She cried often about things that weren't her fault, for example, her parents fighting over little things that didn't matter, and her brother dying of cancer. Since her parents couldn't afford

to pay for the surgery, they had to watch their child die. Marie began to cut herself and distance herself away from everyone she knew. She couldn't focus on school and when her brother died, she felt like nothing mattered anymore... This is when the thoughts started flooding her mind. She would think things like, "Nobody cares about me anyway, if I died nobody would be affected."

She hated her life and couldn't find joy in anything. When I started coming around her, I didn't know about any of Marie's troubles, I just loved her for who she was. We talked constantly at school and when we got close enough to call each other "Best friends" she stopped me walking around our school track. "Adeline" she sounded soft and sincere but not in a joking manner. I stopped laughing and looked at her. "Yes?" She said, "You know you are my best friend." "Of course!" "You mean so much to Adeline." "You don't know how much you've helped me recently" "What do you mean?" Then she began to tell me her story.

She told me everything that happened in her life in recent years. She told me about the self-harm, the suicidal thoughts, and all the moments where she felt like she didn't matter, and she told me how important I made her feel in only the couple of months we've been friends. She is now one of my closest friends and we are inseparable.

Here are some reasons I think suicidal and self-harming thoughts happen in the first place and how they are triggered.

Reasons why I think self-harming thoughts occur:

1. I believe that some people see it to relieve emotions, such as hopelessness, anger, anxiety, or sadness. This is NOT true since self-harming can damage you in the long run.
2. Another reason I believe people self-harm is because they want to feel something "real" when in a time of numbness or distortion or "Detachment of reality." This is NOT a good idea as it can make you feel worse about reality; this CAN lead to suicidal thoughts in the future.
3. I believe that some people think of self-harming to cope with something bad they did in the past in another way to say it is they believe that is a "Self-punishment" this can happen from feelings or emotions such as shame,

guilt. If this is not enough to satisfy a person with their wrongs, then it can lead to a bad habit potentially turning into suicidal thoughts because of guilt.

Reasons why I think suicidal thoughts occur:

1. I believe that suicidal thoughts occur when a person feels trapped in a situation and hopelessness becomes insanely overwhelming for a person.
2. Despair. I believe that people commit when they believe their life will not improve and it will always be dark.
3. Desire to escape pain. I think that when a person's circumstances become too much for them to handle emotionally, they see suicide as the only way out.
4. Believing they are a burden. Some people believe that they are a burden to the people around them and that they do not matter.

Ways I think we can avoid the people around us from thinking this way:

1. Support

If you know someone went through something recently or is going through something, support can help a lot. Just knowing that someone cares about you can change a lot of things. Support can look like a lot of different things, like "Hey you want to talk about it?" "I'm always here if you need someone." Or just simply being there in their space even if it's quiet and you have nothing to say... It can still mean a lot more than you know....

2. Reaching out

Even if you don't think someone is going through something, just a little checkup can mean a lot. A simple "Hey, are you doing okay?" Just showing that you care about how someone is feeling can mean a lot to a person. It makes them feel valued and feel like they matter.

3. Sympathy

If they speak about their situation, IT IS VERY IMPORTANT that you don't do certain things while engaging in conversation. Talk back to them show them that you care by:

Listening and engaging in the conversation with them, actively respond after they are done speaking if you are close to them. A hug can also be beneficial.

Lots of the people who self-harm and have suicidal thoughts overthink, meaning if you seem even the slightest uncomfortable or one odd look it can make them feel as if they need to stop talking or even make them feel worse even if you didn't mean it in a negative way. Talking softly in low tones can make them feel safe about sharing their problems.

One more thing... a gift is nice too.... Even if you don't have money, making art for someone is something nice to

do and can make someone feel special. I am speaking from experience.

Remember: Just because someone is smiling, laughing, or being goofy, this doesn't always mean they are okay.

Things that I think would be beneficial to our community:

I think making a free therapy program for young people 10-16 both male and female would be very good for the Cleveland people. Because of poverty and rent prices rising, along with utilities, and prices increasing for everyday items, most people in our area cannot afford therapy for their young. The amount of times one of my friends told me they cut themselves or had those thoughts was very disappointing. I helped them get through it; many of my friends who had these thoughts said they would apply for therapy if they had the money or the option.

Conclusion

I think suicidal thoughts can be triggered by many things such as unhappiness with one's life or living situation, toxic relationships, loneliness, depression, and even boredom.

Suicide is a very big problem around the world, and we should do what we can to prevent such things from taking place. Simple things such as checking up on a loved one and sharing honest, heartfelt conversations can literally be lifesaving. Small gestures like an excited hug or maybe an eager hand wave that just shows you care. We need to start being more open-minded about those we truly care about. You can say you love someone, but in the end, it means nothing if you just sit and watch them slowly disappear killing themselves.

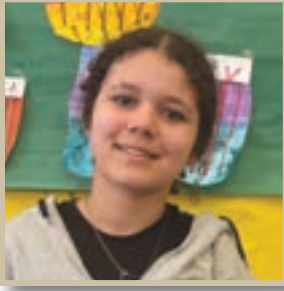
I don't believe that suicide fixes anything in the end, instead I think that it causes more pain for others and it will just result in another cycle of pain. Because when someone commits, it isn't ending the pain itself; it's just multiplying, and it spreads around like a virus infecting anyone who cared or loved that person.

Things always get better, and everyone has issues and their own problems going on in life, but that never makes it okay to harm yourself intentionally in any way, shape or form. People do care, and if not right now, someone in the future will. Pain is always temporary and there is always a way out. Working on yourself for the better is most important. At the end of the day, it is your life and only you can make choices for yourself.

WORK CITED:

https://www.clevelandhealth.org/assets/documents/health/health_statistics/suicidality_brief.pdf

<https://www.ohiospf.org/our-audiences/youth/>



ESSAY 9

SERGIELIZ ORTIZ SANTANA

Luis Muñoz Marin Dual Language Academy

My real violence story and facts about kidnapping!

As a student at Luis Muñoz Marin from Puerto Rico, I have seen multiple violence in my life and how it has affected my family. These are two true stories about what happened to me, my family, and how we found the strength to stay safe.

When I was 12 in summer, I was with my mom and my 2 sisters at Metro Health hospital waiting for them to call us for medications at the pharmacy. My mom was sitting down on her phone, and I was standing next to her because there were no more seats, I was just standing there looking around thinking about when they were going to call us and watching the crowd. Suddenly my eye catches an old man, about in his 40's, taking picture of me, my heart sank I got so scared and I looked up at my mom and whispered to her and said "There is a guy sitting behind you and he is taking pictures of me, he keeps putting his phone up and angling it towards me." My mom turned around and was acting like she was looking for somebody and there she caught him in the act. She got up and went to the front counter and with the little bit of English she knows she told the women sitting in front of the counter that there was a guy taking picture of her daughter (me).

The woman in the front counter then calls the security guards and tells them the situation, the security officer then goes to the man and ask's if he is taking pictures he denies, and the officers ask "can we look through your phone" he doesn't cooperate and tries to walk away they arrest him and look through his phone and they find the picture of me and my mother, but that wasn't the only thing that they found, they found multiple pictures of other women. When they found out, they came up to me and my mom and told us about what they found. I was relieved that he was in handcuffs, but I was still really scared; they later made me fill out a statement on the statement I put what happened earlier. The officers were talking to my mom, and they found out that the old man had been registered offender who had previously sexually assaulted a girl, when my mom told me that news I had thought that girl must have suffered a whole lot, that old man looked

really sketchy in general. While I felt relieved, he was caught, I was terrified. Everybody was so proud of me and congratulating me for telling my mom about the old man taking pictures but I didn't feel really proud I was still a little scared, I was really relieved though something bad could have happened if I didn't see him taking pictures he could have followed us to the car and do something. After leaving the hospital my mom called her boyfriend and told him about the situation he was really scared for her, he said that if he was there, he would have taken it into his own hands and I get it that is weird for an old man.

That same day the thought of that scenario kept running through my head I had the thought I would not get over this, but I talked about it to some friends and family I felt better throughout time but to this day it is still really scary, it's in the past though so I can't change what happened.

Unfortunately, this was not the first time I was exposed to violence. What basically happened is that my mom was in high school senior about to finish the year and had a baby with my dad which would be my older brother and what happened was that after about 1 year my mom then had me after about like another 2-3 years he started acting violent towards my mom and she couldn't take it anymore so we moved to Cleveland and we found a nice apartment to stay in. My mom then met my sister's dad Rodger, and they had my sister Nayeliz, they started good at first and then he started being very abusive and as much she was trying to get away from violence it comes again. She then tries to leave him, but he denies and she couldn't take it anymore and got mad at him, then he ended up leaving. He would apologize to my mom, and she would accept it until the last time they were together he hit her hard and she couldn't take it she threatened to call the police, and he ended up leaving for a while. He was still part of my sisters life until this one day my mom had brought over this really nice guy she met and his kids,

Rodger had come knocking on our door my mom asked what he wanted and he refused to answer trying to open the door, he then said he just wanted to see his daughter but my mom refused because he was trying to force open



his way. He then took a knife out of his pocket and tried to open the door. My mom ended up calling the police and he went to a warning that if he comes by the house again, he is going to jail. He then saw his daughter for the last time and ever since he has never seen her or talked to her. So, I basically have gone through a lot of violent situations since I was little, but I got over it though. This type of violence is caused because people can't get control over their head; they probably think that they just can't get enough and try to get more. Or most people just don't get the resources to help their mental health.

We can reduce this violence by being aware of our surroundings and maybe having more police officers around. We can also stand up and tell somebody if we are experiencing some type of violence in our lives most people don't stand up and tell somebody because of being scared.

I'm safe now and years removed from that environment, I realized how much those events affected me. It's been a few years since I experienced violence, and throughout the years I found it's fragile. I hope that what happened to me and my family never happens to anyone else.



ESSAY 10

SERENITY LATIMER

Douglas MacArthur Girls' Leadership Academy

William Shakespeare once wrote, “violent delights have violent ends.” Whether it’s mental or physical violence, it still hurts. If you’re unfortunate, you’ve probably experienced or witnessed one of these four things; school fights, street fights, threats, or shootings. We’ve been suffering from violence for over 10,000 years. It’s time to start anew.

For me personally, I’d never throw a punch unless it was for self-defense. What’s the point of purposeful violence? Usually, it’s for power. I didn’t understand until... When I was quite young, I got into a school fight. It wasn’t from whom I expected. It wasn’t my bully, it was one of my best friends. I won’t say the details for privacy purposes. Out of the blue—POW! She grabbed me by my hair and hit me. Now again, my mother always taught me, “if someone touches you, use your self defense”. Plop. She was on the ground before I knew it. I remember being sent to the school counselor and taken home. Of course, my mom was on my side, but was I? Did I do the right thing, fighting my own friend for power over the situation? Most people would say, “you were just protecting yourself” or “she started it, you’re not the one to blame”, but it takes

a while to understand that. I wish I didn’t have to fight. Experiences like that stick with you, like a scar across your heart. Now that I understand that violence can happen anywhere, it scares me for what the victims and attackers go through.

Violence affects the daily lives of me and the people around me. We have to live in fear wherever we go. Nowadays, you never see children enjoying the park. Why is that? Well, there’s a lot of street violence and gang activity. Even at school, parents and students are concerned about school fights and shootings, but school is a priority. Isn’t that upsetting? From youth through adulthood, we must be precautionary. What can we do to fix this devastating situation? Well, look at the people around you. Think about the ones who are your friends and the ones you don’t get along with. Would your enemies hurt you in any way? Now imagine you were all friends. There would be no reason for anyone to consider violence because you’re all friends. Easily said than done, but keep in mind, everyone deserves to be treated with respect. Treat people how you want to be treated. That saying gets overlooked often. Maybe you’ve heard it, but are you living it?

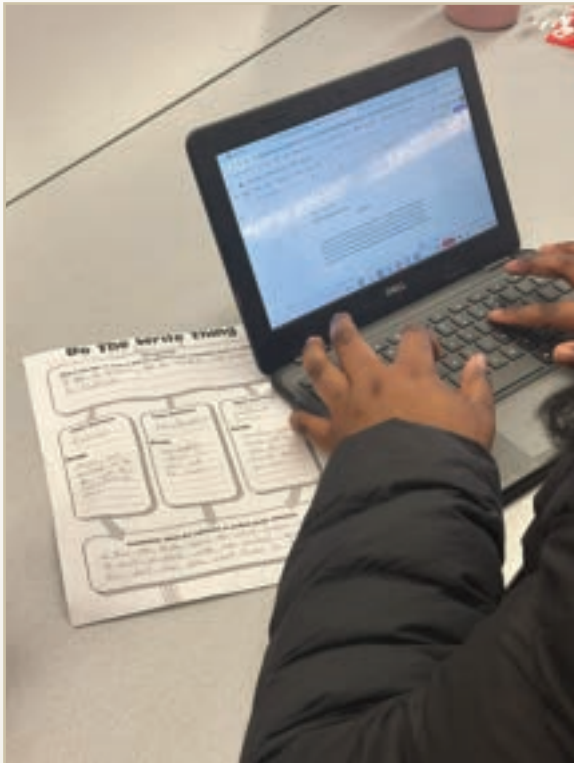


SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

A very special thank you to **Holly Spooner** from William Rainey Harper for guiding her 2nd and 7th grade scholars in creating the powerful “*We Are the Change: We are Art Activists*” and “*Speaking Without Words: Justice Through Our Eyes*” art gallery. Your work added depth and creativity to our ceremony and reminded us all of the impact young people can make through artistic expression.

Thank you for being part of this celebration of youth voice and positive change!







Do the Write Thing

2026

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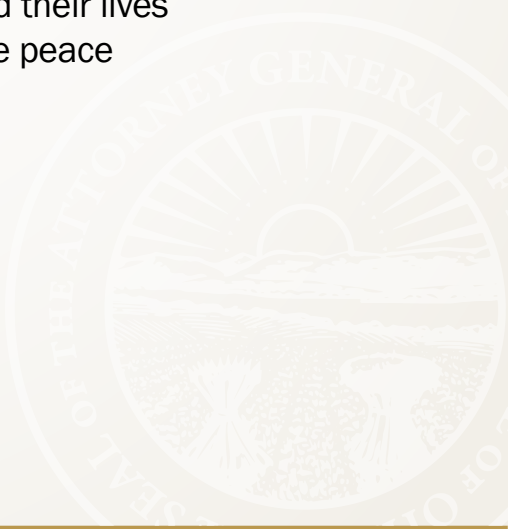


Do the Write Thing *Springfield*



2026

Springfield 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 pleased to continue our partnership with the Springfield City School District for the *Do the Write Thing* program for the fifth year in a row.

Through *Do the Write Thing*, Springfield’s middle-school students had the opportunity to write about violence and how it has affected their lives. As always, these students embraced the chance to share their experiences and offer ideas for a safer community.

I was so impressed by their honesty, insight, and compassion. These essays most certainly are not easy to write, and often tough to read, but the impact of their words is invaluable to our understanding and the pursuit of a more peaceful society.

I commend Springfield City Schools for recognizing the importance of this program and the benefits it brings to the students, teachers, and greater community. Giving our young people a voice and truly listening to what they have to say will leave an impact on their lives that will have untold benefits in the future.

I encourage you to take time to read these essays. You will learn something, and I am confident you will come away encouraged by the next generation.

Yours,



DAVE YOST
Ohio Attorney General



FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Dear SCSD Middle School Writers,

First, I want to congratulate each of you for stepping up and using your voice in the *Do The Write Thing* Challenge. Writing is one of the most powerful ways to express your thoughts, emotions, and experiences, and by participating in this competition, you have exhibited just how strong and courageous you are.

Out of more than 100 entries across our district, you have risen to the top, proving that your voice, your story and your opinions have tremendous value. You should be incredibly proud of yourselves. Your teachers, principals, families, and the entire Springfield community are cheering you on — not just for what you’ve written, but for the impact your words will have.

Violence affects so many lives, and I know that writing about it isn’t easy. But it is necessary. Your words help people see what’s really happening in our schools and neighborhoods. They bring awareness, spark conversations, and inspire change. **Your voice matters. Your experiences matter. And most importantly, YOU have the power to make a difference — both in your own life and in the world around you.**

I want to extend a special congratulations to the finalist who will be representing the SCSD in Washington, D.C. But to every single student who took part in this challenge, know this: **You are already making an impact.** Keep using your voice. Keep writing. Keep standing up for what you believe in. Change starts with people like you.

We see you. We hear you. We believe in you.

Go Wildcats!

Sincerely,



ROBERT F. HILL, Ed.D.
Superintendent and CEO
Springfield City School District



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This book contains a compilation of writings by middle-school students who were selected as the finalists of the 2026 *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 Springfield

During the 2025-26 school year, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost partnered with the Springfield City School District for the *Do the Write Thing* program.

The program was well received, with more than 100 seventh- and eighth-grade students participating.

Springfield community and business leaders volunteered their time to read each essay and choose the submissions most responsive to the key questions. From those, one student was selected to become Ohio's ambassador to the national *Do the Write Thing* conference in Washington, D.C.

A special 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 Springfield.



Do the Write Thing is the flagship program of the National Campaign to Stop Violence and has been in existence for more than 30 years. It operates programs in 29 cities in 15 states. Over the 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

LA'MAJESTIE BLAKE

Roosevelt Middle School

Violence is very common in the world and needs to be stopped. I have experienced violence in many ways, straight along the lines of abuse, neglect, and bullying.

First, we are going to start with bullying. I have been bullied between the ages of 7-13. I was bullied for everything about myself, including my hair, body, teeth, the way I acted, how I looked, even the shoes I wore and the way I dressed. People would hit me knowing I wouldn't do anything back. This caused me to be insecure about myself my whole life. This made me feel like I wasn't important enough or didn't matter.

Bullying is very normalized and common. According to [unicef.org](https://www.unicef.org), "Worldwide, close to 130 million, or slightly more than 1 in 3, students between the ages of 13 and 15 experience bullying." This is a huge problem, especially because these are your prime teenage years where you really start caring what other people think. This can easily cause you to be insecure and cause even deeper problems such as, depression, and suicidal tendencies. A study from kslegislature.gov states, "Bully victims are between 2 to 9 times more likely to consider suicide than non-victims, according to studies by Yale University". This quote shows that bullying can unfortunately increase the risk of suicide.

Second, neglect is one of the most difficult things to realize that is happening, especially when it comes to children. Throughout my life I was neglected. My clothes were always too small, refrigerators and freezers were locked which limited food access. Not all my needs were always met, whether it was mentally or physically. I didn't realize until I finally got out of the situation which was a little over 7 years later. To this day, I'm still figuring out more and more how I was neglected and didn't realize.

Neglect is very difficult to notice for many reasons. First, neglect usually starts in the early stages of life which can make it hard to realize. [Childprotect.org](https://www.childprotect.org) states, "Most children become victims of abuse and neglect at 18 months or younger". Since this is how you're raised, it's very easy to think that the way you are being treated is normal. Second, emotional neglect is the most common type of neglect for its way of being difficult to recognize. This is because emotional neglect and signs can easily be excused for something else. For example, not giving your child enough

physical affection can be seen as a way of emotional neglect which could make your child seem clingy or needy. This can just be seen as a child craving all the attention possible and would be brushed off that way. Also, a parent being emotionally unavailable can be seen as child neglect. This can easily cause the child to also be emotionally unavailable also and distant. This will cause many people to simply see it as the child has an attitude all the time. In conclusion, neglect is very tough to notice, especially emotional neglect.

For our third and last topic, abuse. Now, abuse can be many different things, there are many different types. Some are easier to recognize and some can range from hard to extremely difficult to realize. I went through many different types of abuse which ranged from, physical, mental, and sexual abuse.

The physical abuse I went through included, hitting, slapping, hair pulling, being pushed or thrown around, and being beat with objects. If I would simply break something by accident, I was at risk of being hit. I've had my hair pulled and head hit against the wall before over a slice of pizza. I have been hit with switches that left big bumps on my body. It was very difficult going through something like this but I saw it as normal.

Physical abuse is a really big problem in the United States and can result in long term effects including death. According to [National Statistics on Child Abuse - National Children's Alliance](https://www.nationalstatistics.gov), "In 2022, an estimated 1,990 children died from abuse and neglect in the United States". This shows how big of a problem this really is. Especially in the black community as [National Statistics on Child Abuse - National Children's Alliance](https://www.nationalstatistics.gov) states, "African-American child fatalities (6.37 per 100,000) is over three times greater than that of white children (1.99), and nearly four times greater than Hispanic children (1.68)". This is really sad to see my own community struggle like this.

Next, my experience with sexual abuse. I was SA'd from the very young age of 5 years old to about 9 years old. This abuse was made by a very close family member in my family who would babysit me. He would call it "play fighting" as my private parts would get touched and I would get rubbed against. I didn't know how wrong it was for me being so young. I was told to keep it a secret, which



I did. Later when I told a trusted adult who was also close to that family member, i was told it was “too late” and I waited “too long”. It is never too late to report a SA that you went through no matter the circumstances.

This is another big problem in the United States. National Statistics on Child Abuse - National Children's

Alliance, states that, “1 in 4 girls and 1 in 13 boys in the US are estimated to experience child sexual abuse”. This is a terrifying percentage for the US and very sad. It is common for children to experience sexual abuse, espically little girls. Not only that, teens are at a high risk too. Statistics: Children & Teens - RAINN says that “66% of victims are ages 12-17”. This shows the must higher risk teens are at when it comes to sexual abuse. Not only that, it could be more difficult to report because the assaulter is most likely to be someone that the teen knows or a close relative. Statistics: Children & Teens - RAINN also states that, “93% of victims under 18 know their abuser”. Almost 100% of victims under the age of 18 know their abuser! This is crazy and honestly really sad. From Statistics: Children & Teens - RAINN, the statistics of this are, 59% were acquaintances, 34% were family members, and only 7% were strangers! This shows that most likely the abuser is known by the victim. It is not always assumed that a family member or acquaintance would do such a thing.

Let's talk about mental abuse. Now a lot of mental abuse can be hard to tell, many people just see it as discipline. Mental abuse can include screaming, yelling, name calling, and insulting. I have gone through a lot with mental abuse. I would get screamed at for the smallest inconveniences,



Participants from Roosevelt Middle School

called out my name to make me feel bad about myself, I've had insults yelled at me. This type of mental abuse lead to me having many insecurities. Also, this wouldn't just happen at home, school was another main place for mental abuse.

Unfortunately, mental abuse can easily be seen as discipline. When

it is not a way to discipline a child. Calling your child out their name, yelling, screaming, or insulting them can lead right under the category of bullying. This can easily lead to mental issues and suicidal thoughts especially if it is by your own parents. If you ever say something to your child to hurt them or make them feel bad are sorry, you are right on the road of mental abuse. In conclusion, we need to learn the difference between mental abuse and discipline.

To conclude this essay, what can we do to stop this violence? First, we must learn the signs, if you see someone who seems hurt all the time under a certain person's care, your best bet is to check up on them to make sure they are not a victim of abuse. If you meet someone who is overly hyper sexual, that could be a sign of past or present sexual abuse. If you see someone without their needs met, that could be a sign of neglect. Stand up for people or tell a trusted adult if you see someone getting bullied. Second, speak up! If that person is confirmed to be in a bad situation, speak up about it. Tell a trusted adult or authority figure to help. Speaking up doesn't make you a “snitch” or a bad friend, it can make you a hero. Always remember your emergency contact numbers. Lastly, always check up on your friends or family to make sure their mental health is good, maybe even if it's a person you don't know!



ESSAY 2

SARA COLLINS

Hayward Middle School

How violence had affected my life, I grew up around terrible people. Especially my mom, who didn't really want me and was rarely there for me. She sold most of mine and my dad's things for meth, cocaine, and so on. When I left school one day in 1st grade, my father was crying at the bus stop telling me my mom had left us. I had grown up struggling, went to counselors, there were people my mother had stolen from, trying to hurt me and my dad. I had to move from school to school, place to place, just so I was safe from those people. My mom had ruined my life in many ways, and she wasn't present in it. My father didn't even let me go to her house on weekends because she was constantly on something and didn't want me to be harmed by my own mother and her men. It still affects me now, she still tries to talk to me, and my father worries she'll come up to my school one day to pick me up. She's in rehab now, has her own car, and everything. But, I don't know her intentions with me and I don't wanna risk anything.

The causes of youth violence, especially with those that grew up with drug addicts, usually end up trying out drugs, carrying their own traumas and being a repeat drug user. As for young kids seeing an adult, their own parent(s) or parental guardian, trying it out, will have it carried on onto them later on in the future. Their grades get lower, they barely do any school work, and so on. I already know someone in Missouri, who has already done terrible things, all from being under the influence of marijuana.

What I can do to reduce this, is tell my story to those who have suffered the same, or similar way like me. I want their voice to be heard, they're being listened to, and they can heal from their traumas instead of coping with them in bad ways. They can be successful, cope with it in better ways, and so on. I don't let my mother's drug use get to me and tempt me into going onto her path, and so can others.



ESSAY 3

OLIVIA DRISCOLL

Schaefer Middle School

The thing about violence is that it never truly ends. Most people think that with many protests and some convincing, violence will stop or, at least, decrease, but in reality, there is always going to be someone who hates another person so much that they do something that hurts the other person and even those around them. Violence can't be stopped, but most of the time it can be prevented. According to Google, a little over 40% of teenagers experience some sort of abuse or violent interaction against other teenagers and sometimes adults. Violence doesn't always have to be physical; it can be against your mindset as well. I experienced my first psychologically violent interaction in 4th grade when two kids started picking on me because of my looks, and even though that was some years ago, it still has an impact on how I act and see myself. For a long time after that event, I didn't like the way I looked and changed who I was because of it, but now I'm more confident and have learned to accept who I am. The thing about that, though, is that not everybody is that strong. Some people live with the feeling of not looking good or being weird for the rest of their lives, and that can be very harmful to the person's mental health and possibly their physical health as well. Most of the times youth violence is often caused by bullying

or personal problems with another person that escalates when others or the same couple of people start instigating the argument. A few ways to prevent the situation from getting worse are to tell an adult about the person or people with whom you are having problems. Suppose the problematic person is threatening you or others. In that case, you should consult with a superior who knows how to handle such situations and avoid interacting with the other person until the issue is resolved. Even after it is solved, you should be cautious around the other person for a little while. Suppose you are not being bullied or experiencing any problems with anyone, but you see someone else being picked on or targeted. In that case, you should still report your concerns to an adult and speak with the victim of the argument or bullying to ensure they're okay. Not everyone has someone to talk to in these situations, and they often end up feeling worse about it, which can lead to even worse consequences for the people involved.

In conclusion, don't hesitate to help someone who is being bullied or is in a difficult situation. If you are in a difficult situation, don't hesitate to ask for help. It's better to look bad from one person's perspective than to let people treat you like you're less valuable than anyone else.



ESSAY 4

OLIVIA HEARN

Hayward Middle School

One way violence has affected my life was when I was very young when I first saw my dad hit my mom for the first time.

I thought it was normal till I went to other people's houses and started to relive that it's not normal or okay.

A couple years went by and he did the same to me, constantly yelling and screaming made me feel like I had no one in my corner for me to talk to and my mom was always locked in a room.

I was always scared of what might happen next.

Then my sister was born.

He got worse on the drugs and became a horrible person to be around at this time.

We were not allowed to see my family anymore and that hurt the most.

But once my brother was born things got horrible like he would hit me and called me a liar because he thought my mom had guys in the house but never did and he got even worse on drugs.

I was scared for my mom and siblings' lives.

At this point in my life I was always crying hoping for better and one night my dad was in the shower.

And I was upstairs skating and my mom ran upstairs and she told us to hurry and at this time we were living with my grandma who supported my dad's crimes and abuse.

She asked us where we were going but my mom told her we were just going to the store and we ran out.

My mom was scared but still drove safely.

She stopped at this pizza shop to calm down and a lady came out to ask what was going on and my mom told her everything and apparently the lady has gone through it too.

and the little pizza shop gave us three pizzas.

After we ate, my mom called the cops and they came and showed us a place for women to go and get away from the abuse.

We were there for almost one year and after that year we thought he changed and went back...

but no he didn't.

things that were good for a week then went back to the old ways then one night I woke up because I felt uneasy. My dad was in my room staring at my blank tv screen.

I was so confused but I just went back to sleep .

In the morning he was yelling at mom saying there was a "guy" on the tv screen but i saw that the screen was blank last night .

I stood up for my mom and said the screen was blank last night and he yelled in my face and called me a liar and slapped me.

I yelled and screamed madly and hurt.

That night my dad made me crush the drugs and when I said no he slapped me so I just did it.

After a couple weeks my mom noticed he's not changing so she made a run for herself.

She told us she's gonna get us but my sister was still young and told him where she went.

But that same day we ended up getting away again.

Thankfully he went inside and used the bathroom so while he was inside we took the car and left.

We stopped by a church and they told us a place to go for women that were in an abusive relationship so we went and we didn't go back.

We moved to Urbana for a little bit and i loved it there, the school, the people everything and my mom felt better too and my siblings.

We lived in Urbana for two years and my mom found a boyfriend and when I came home from school I met him and I didn't like him at all.

He was disrespectful and I felt at this time I can read people because ive been through so much with people that aren't right in their mind.

But the owner of this place that helps women came back so we had to move back to Springfield and stay in that place again and the lady in the one in Springfield was very rude and hateful when we came back.



It was near Christmas and I got out of school and my mom told me we got our own home.

I was full of joy but it still felt weird but it's probably because it was going by so quickly.

Once we moved in my mom boyfriend moved in with us but he got kicked out because he's weird but after he got kicked out i finally felt like i was really at home.

but i started stressing again over thinking and believing all these things people say i tried to kill myself and went to the mental hospital worse week ever but i knew deep down i was getting the help i needed.

When I came home I felt light like a huge weight was lifted.

and finally I felt like I could move on.

What helped me was getting help and talking about my problems And repeated quotes and writing down my feelings that how i got old that old mindset.

This story is for the kids and parents that have been through this type of situation and to let them know that they are not alone and there's people out there that have gone through tough times too.



Participants from Hayward Middle School



ESSAY 5

JASYLA LAMBEY

Schaefer Middle School

As I was growing up, I endured extreme bullying, which threw my mental health into a complete spiral. I remember being deeply depressed my fifth-grade year all the way into my seventh grade because I physically and mentally couldn't get myself out of the DARK hole that other kids made me quiver into. I remember exactly where it all started. When I moved to Springfield, Ohio, I was so excited to fit in. I didn't even think to change anything about me. I remember going into my fifth-grade class and hearing people whisper things about me, calling me names, and saying things about me when I hadn't even known anybody in that classroom; it was all just based on the way I looked. That was the first time I had EVER experienced bullying the first day of my fifth grade year I hadn't even felt welcome but felt ashamed of who i was i was ashamed of being in my own skin but most of all being my own person, later on that year I had begun to fit in I felt joy being in everyone's presence and being in the whole fifth grades friend group. Then time moved so fast, and by the time I knew it, we were in sixth grade, nobody had warned me that everyone who acts like your friend isn't your friend. There was a boy who moved to our school and we liked each other so we ended up getting together, but I had two best friends. Our relationship struggled because they accused me of being "lesbian" because of rumors, we had a huge argument and broke up, I didn't know that my not being in a relationship with someone would end up ruining my ENTIRE middle school experience later on that night after the breakup and argument with the boy. I was added to a Snapchat group chat. Every single person who i thought was my friend but wasn't was in that group chat I couldn't believe my "friends" would make fun of me the way they did they sent pictures of me and began to shame my whole entire face and everything about me, they shamed me for my taste in clothes, for my hair, and my personality , they called me the rudest names i had ever been called i couldn't help but cry after feeling so betrayed and hated. The next day I held my head high and walked into class. When I walked into class, everyone stared at me in disgust and mean-mugged me, but didn't even know my side of the story; they just believed his side. Everybody was trying to fight me, but around that time, I was a child who stood against violence. I'd never imagine myself fighting someone especially not someone

who i thought was my friend because obviously i loved that person, but it was always me as the hated person and i hated that for myself moving onto seventh grade i changed EVERYTHING about me i changed the way I looked, I changed the way smiled, the way I laughed, and tried to be way more cautious of who i called my "friends" but that wasn't enough. At the beginning of the year i did fit in and i had a big friend group just like fifth and sixth grade expect this time i was way more aware of who i trusted and didnt, but even worse this time i wasn't someone who stood against violence because I swore to myself id never let someone bully me again or aim to put their hands on me without me fighting back. But little did i know it wasnt the fact that i had friends but it was the fact that i had a friend group, at that time and age i didn't exactly understand that having a friend group sometimes isn't the best decision and i had to learn the hard way further on into the seventh grade year I witnessed one of my friends fall out with our friend group but since i was the closest to her I stood her ground for her and stood up for her more than i did for myself come to find out she was talking about me and that was the biggest stab in my back for me because i put myself into a situation where I could've got jumped just for her. And whilst i was in this situation where u may have got jumped she was no WHERE TO BE FOUND but she was at school, seventh grade was a big repeat of my fifth through sixth grade year not because of the fact i had fallouts because thats gonna happen in life, but because i continued to quiver down into a dark hole due to bullying and the things people would say about me because as a sensitive person words really do affect me. Due to being depressed it got to a stage where i wanted to kill myself and the people continuously texting me and trying to fight me didn't help my case at all & nor did the way my home life was being in a situation where I had a horrible home life and was getting bullied for three years straight absolutely didn't help increase my mental health but instead lowered it and a kid threading to shoot me after smacking me while having a gun in his hand made me believe that life wasn't something worth living. It's been one year since I dealing with not being bullied, but those past three years gave me horrible depression and thoughts about myself. Even the days I got so close to doing something stupid like killing

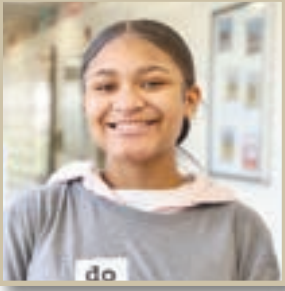


myself, I thought twice & I'm glad to be where I am today and for who I've grown to be because I don't know how people would have lived without me & I wouldn't wanna be the reason someone else decided to leave earth as well. You know violence is mostly seen towards adults nowadays, but in reality, it's really our youth, because not only do the youth group bully people to the point where some children lose their lives, but they're also the ones killing people with guns, jumping people, and stealing things every day. And it's not because it's something I believe the youth does on purpose, but because they had no guidance growing up and no one to show or teach them that what they're doing is wrong. And if they did have that guidance, they fell into the wrong crowd. Youth violence is something that is overlooked but needs more attention brought to it because bullying isn't even the worst problem; the fact that CHILDREN have the guts to kill people is what is. But in reality, youth violence will never

end, but what we can do is put our foot down and engage in things that will help us end or prevent these problems with youth. I believe it can be stopped, but within time. But that's my story on how youth violence affected my life, and I'd like to say before you bully someone you should put yourself in their shoes because for some kids, your actions may lead to another person's death, leading the responsibility and guilt to you. So think twice about the words you say to people and twice before you choose to do the actions u do including picking up guns or stealing peoples cars, because even as a child yes living can be hard and sometimes even hard to survive but life is like a book you have some hard chapters and long but then you'll have shorter and easier chapters concluding to your life becoming better and more interesting also easy. Ending youth violence will never be simple nor easy, but we can prevent it and we can put an end to it soon.



Participants from Schaefer Middle School



ESSAY 6

LONDYNN HOLDER

Hayward Middle School

Boy let me tell you, fighting in school gets you nowhere but suspended and you might lose a friend don't do it to show out in front of your friends if u have somebody agging it on walk away dont let it get to u it could be hard but let me tell u about my first fight so u could try and get a better understanding of why we shouldn't fight when I first fought. It probably affected me cause I fought one of my closest friends. And it hurt me cause it was the only person I trusted. When that happened it felt like I had nobody. having nobody is hard and than i got my phone took. had nothing to do but lay down i was suspended being suspended boy changed my life it was the first time and i was an a and b honor roll student no phone no friends no nothing. Come to think it was because of people instigating

Sometimes I caught myself wanting to reach out. I didn't know if she'd feel the same way so I held back on it. It hurt so bad because I knew I wasn't ok without her but was she was ok without me? We told each other everything. When we were mad we called each other when we were hurt. We called each other, we talked about everything. Then we fought and it made me think I was the problem.

But when we talked after the fight I came to find out we felt the same way. We both understood each other. We couldn't understand how we let something so small come in between us and after so long we came back coo we still have arguments but we promised to never bring the fight up.



ESSAY 7

ASHANTYNA JOSEPH

Schaefer Middle School

I'm from Haiti, where violence is a common thing. You can find it anywhere like school the internet on the street in a house or a market. and i was raise in a house full of violence with a dad that love beating up women's and at school i got yelled at or hit sometimes and it infected my life cause now even the smallest noise makes me flinch. but now i have a stepdad that is way better than my dad and i love him and all but i have trust issues. i want to trust but i'm scared that it will be broken again and again. i have a little brother named "fabio" and i don't him to

have the same childhood that i had growing up cause i love to see him smile and play around happilly and i like to hear him laugh. and i hate to see him cry cause it makes me cry. someone might use violence from depression or madness or sadness or poor behavior control or under the influence of drugs or alcohol. fostering positive environments through mentoring and comminty programs providing education on conflict resulation and coping skills and offering support to families and individuals.



ESSAY 8

JOCELYN ROY

Hayward Middle School

Youth violence is a very bad and unhealthy thing. Youth violence can mess up someone's mental health or even affect the youths lifestyle. Nobody should do youth violence such as Domestic Abuse, bullying, cyberbullying, SA, Murder, and many more. All types of youth violence could traumatize a kid and could take them years to recover from it. How would you feel if youth violence happened to you.?

There are a lot of causes and reasons for youth violence.

Youth violence is a very bad thing but a lot of people experience it from another having bad mental health. Most causes why people harm kids is because of their mental health. Another cause of why people harm kids is because the person that could bully or harm you in any way might have experienced it before. Or it could even occur by the use of drugs or beer.

If I could reduce youth violence I would do a couple things. One thing I would do to reduce youth violence is make sure everyone's mental health is okay by doing a world wide survey. In this survey adults and kids have to

take it. People that dont have good mental health I would try to help them so they dont harm themself or any one else.

I hope that standing up for youth violence goes well because everyone deserves to have a good mentality. I want to make sure everyone's mental health is well so they don't do anything that could harm a human or pet. I also hope that people in school don't get bullied and hurt by others because they are in school to learn, not to get hurt physically and mentally. Helping others mentally would be an awesome thing to do because they wouldn't harm others and have any thoughts. That's what I hope standing up for youth violence does.

Youth violence is really impactive on teenagers. Youth violence towards teenagers can really mess their mental up, leading them to harm others or themself. Any type of youth violence could ruin a teenagers head up especially when they are still in their development state. Youth violence on a teenager can have them develop social anxiety or even depression. Teenagers could even have trouble learning and talking in school because of youth violence.



ESSAY 9

DYLAN SHAW

Schaefer Middle School

Youth violence has affected many people and there are many causes.

Youth violence is caused by things such as drugs, alcohol and other things. Drugs and alcohol can affect the brains of teens and can cause emotions such as anger and depression. This can lead to youth violence, but this is not the only cause. Another cause is the adults in their lives that raise them. If a child is treated with no restrictions and infinite freedom from their adult (permissive), then this can lead to a child growing up not knowing the difference in good and bad because the parents may have not taught that, as well as these teens without supervision can go out and do things they are not supposed to such as youth violence. They also may become violent by abusive parents or parents that argue with each other often that influences a child to grow up and also be violent. This shows many causes in youth violence that can happen.

Youth violence has affected my life too. Youth violence is scary for me because I feel like I am less safe outside my house because of youth violence around that can appear anywhere that may harm me. I remember when my school was receiving threats so my mom didn't let me go to school for 1-3 days which worried me about what would happen if those threats were a reality. I also worry about

school because of school fights that happen either in the hallways, or near a school, leaving me to worry about the people around me in school.

There are ways youth violence can be reduced. By finding the causes of youth violence we can understand how to reduce it. A good way would be for the government to encourage better parental supervision and better parenting among parents since it is a factor in teen violence. Another way would be to lower accessibility to drugs and alcohol as teens as it may affect their brain in a negative way. A final way would be for the government or whoever runs the place to have a more welcoming community and environment since a bad community can influence teens into encouraging them into bad behavior.

In conclusion, youth violence has multiple factors such as communities, parents, and drugs/alcohol. This can be stopped by reducing these factors such as welcoming communities, better parenting, and lowering drug/alcohol accessibility to teens. Youth violence has affected me and others, for me it made me fear leaving my home a bit due to my safety concerns about school fights and violence around places. Because of this, youth violence should be stopped.



ESSAY 10

TREVON WILLIAMS

Hayward Middle School

When I was a little kid I had a lot of anger and sometimes I couldn't control myself. One time I was playing basketball with my younger brother at the park and I got so mad I threw the ball at his head. After that he fell on the ground and wouldn't get up. When I got him up I noticed his head was bleeding badly. I went in my backpack so fast and called my mom and she rushed to the park as quickly as she could. After that day I noticed how much destruction I caused and how violence can get in your head and make you do bad things.

Violence is a way to show someone's emotions and show how they feel. Violence can get you in bad trouble and even get you involved with the police. Young kids who

do violent things could be going through things or just had no one to show them how to be a kid. Kids probably never had an adult by their side to tell them what's wrong or right. Violence can make you a bad person in reality and in the heart.

I can work with people who can help me and others with solving violence. Also we can find a way to make young kids feel seen and protected again. We can help people in mental class and make them feel like they belong and that we're here for them. I can talk with the lead of this violence group and get a more understanding about young kids with violence. There's many ways I and others can help with violence.



DAVE YOST

OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL

Do the Write Thing 2026

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SPRINGFIELD CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

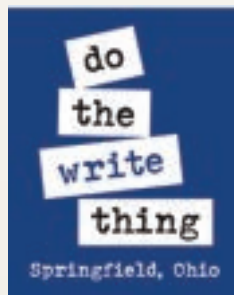
Office of Teaching, Learning and
Professional Development
700 S. Limestone St., Suite A
Springfield, OH 45505
937-505-2800

www.scsdoh.org

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO STOP VIOLENCE

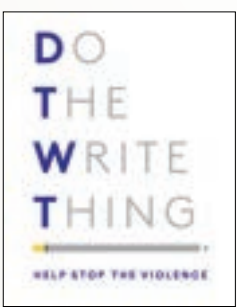
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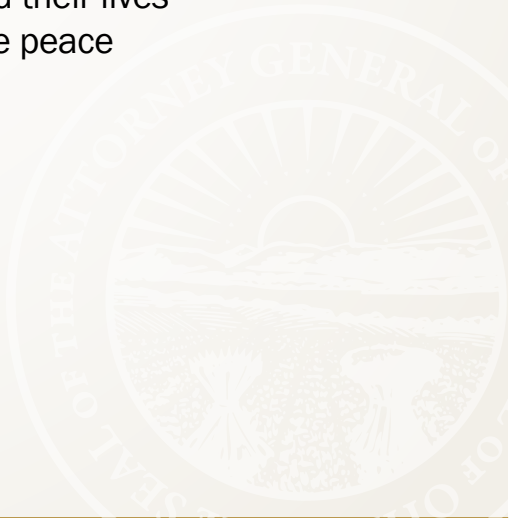


Do the Write Thing
Youngstown



2026

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 pleased to continue our partnership with the Youngstown City School District for the *Do the Write Thing* program for the fourth year in a row.

Through *Do the Write Thing*, Youngstown's middle-school students had the opportunity to write about violence and how it has affected their lives. As always, these students embraced the chance to share their experiences and offer ideas for a safer community.

I was so impressed by their honesty, insight, and compassion. These essays most certainly are not easy to write, and often tough to read, but the impact of their words is invaluable to our understanding and the pursuit of a more peaceful society.

I commend Youngstown City Schools for recognizing the importance of this program and the benefits it brings to the students, teachers, and greater community. Giving our young people a voice and truly listening to what they have to say will leave an impact on their lives that will have untold benefits in the future.

I encourage you to take time to read these essays. You will learn something, and I am confident you will come away encouraged by the next generation.

Yours,



DAVE YOST
Ohio Attorney General



FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

As Superintendent of Youngstown City Schools, I am incredibly proud to support the *Do the Write Thing* initiative and, more importantly, to uplift the voices of our scholars. Providing students with a platform to share their experiences and perspectives is not just meaningful — it is necessary. When our young people speak openly about what they see, feel and navigate each day, they help us better understand their reality and challenge us as adults to respond with purpose, urgency and care.

The issue of youth violence is complex, but awareness and reflection are powerful starting points for change. Through their writing, our students are not only expressing themselves — they are leading. They are helping to shape safer, stronger communities by calling attention to the impact of violence and the importance of making better choices. I am proud of the courage and honesty reflected in their work, and I commend each student featured in this booklet for using their voice to make a difference. At YCSD, we remain committed to listening, learning, and standing alongside our scholars as we continue to Defend the Y and build a better future together.

With pride and appreciation,



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeremy J. Batchelor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

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 finalists of the 2026 *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 2025-26 school year, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost partnered with the Youngstown City School District for the *Do the Write Thing* program.

More than 200 sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students submitted essays. Their work is their own and has not been independently verified.

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, one student was selected to become an Ohio ambassador to the national *Do the Write Thing* conference in Washington, D.C.

Thank you to the community volunteers, teachers, principals and school administrators, as well as staff members from Youngstown State University, who helped make *Do the Write Thing* such a great success in Youngstown. We also want to recognize Superintendent Jeremy Batchelor and CAO Aaron Bouie for helping with the final selection of the top essay.



Do the Write Thing is the flagship program of the National Campaign to Stop Violence and has been in existence for more than 30 years. It operates programs in 29 cities in 15 states. Over the 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

LONDON BRIGHT

Chaney Middle School

Youth violence is defined as acts or behaviors that can occur among young people between the ages of 10-25 that are violent or abusive in nature. These acts/behaviors can be both verbal and physical. Youth violence can include things like fighting, name-calling, unwanted jokes, teasing, bullying and assault. Youth violence can happen anywhere, anytime and amongst any demographic of people. Youth violence can happen to anyone. There are many signs of youth violence which can include things like a history of violent behavior, being a victim of bullying, mental illness, family problems, and being a person that comes from a family of violence. How a person chooses to handle these issues can have a negative impact on their life and the lives of others around them. Entire communities like Youngstown, Ohio have been impacted by youth violence. Youth violence and bullying are serious issues that we all must address as a community for things to get better.

How has youth violence and bullying affected my life? I have been exposed to incidents of violence at school and have seen students being bullied as well. Kids can be mean and tease others for no reason. I have seen kids fight each other and argue while in class and the lunchroom. Several students have argued with each other and with teachers at my school. They often talk back to the teachers and do not listen to the adults. I have heard others use profanity and call each other names. I try to separate myself from these students because I know that this behavior is wrong. When things like this happen at school, I can talk to my family about it. My family helps me to make the right choices and stay away from them. My family has explained to me how some students do not have the same upbringing as I do.

In my community, I have heard of kids committing assaults, robberies and even murders on the news. Gun violence does seem to be an issue among younger people. There have been times where young people have killed each other in my community. For example, at my old school, there was a cheerleader at Valley Christian School

who was shot and killed at a party. I remember when this happened because the school had a memorial for her at school. I'm not sure of the reason for the violence, but I can say that it is serious and can be very dangerous. What are the causes of youth violence? Youth violence can take place because young people can have a hard time controlling their emotions. Some people believe that fighting and using violence is the only way to handle a problem. Some people come from homes where there is no structure, Others have learned these behaviors from their family and friends. Some kids did not have positive role models and did not have someone to talk to when they needed advice. I have noticed a lot of kids at school participate in violence because they like to see others unhappy. Youth violence can also be caused by peer pressure.

What can I do to reduce youth violence? I can be a positive role model to others. I can lead by example and not involve myself in negative situations. I can talk to my family about things that bother me and allow them to help me if I have a problem with someone. It's important to treat others how you would like to be treated. My mother has always taught me to stick up for myself and never allow people to bully me. Another way I can reduce violence would be to tell a trusted adult if something doesn't seem right. Taking the time to think about my actions is a great way to reduce violence. Participating in sports and other activities is another good way to reduce youth violence.

In conclusion, youth violence and bullying are issues that need to be handled by everyone. Parents, the youth and the community need to show respect for each other. We all come from different backgrounds. The youth need to take the time to talk out their issues instead of fighting. Bullying is not okay. Parents need to work on being positive role models in their kids' lives. Youth violence in my community can be reduced if we have more positive activities to do.



ESSAY 2

CA'MYA BURNETT

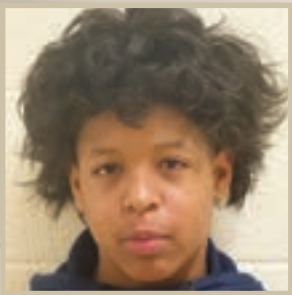
East Middle School

Violence has affected my life in the beginning of 2025. Why? Because when my uncle got shot and died my mom was very sad and her mood was changed for a while which made me start to be sad because he had just got out of jail then turned around and died. I was at home when out of nowhere my mom just started screaming and crying. At first I thought my dad died but then I found out it was my uncle, my mom's close brother. My mom just cried for like a week or maybe a month. My uncle wasn't living near me because I lived in Warren and moved to Youngstown so we didn't see him often. He was in jail a lot so we didn't spend much time but when we did we had fun. Just a week before he died he helped my mom move into her new house. She thought he would be gone that fast, like in a blink of an eye. Something that could stop killings from happening is gun violence if people stop using guns as defense it wouldn't be as many deaths as it is right now.

Parents sometimes bully their kids when they're jealous of them, if a mom thinks her daughter looks better than her and gets more attention the mom would most likely try to keep them in the house and try to ruin their looks, parents could also say stuff to try to bring the kids down and make them feel like they're not enough. Causes of youth violence are sometimes bullying, it also could be their parents verbally bullying them or their siblings.

Some kids may want to do youth violence when their parents constantly drain them and call them lazy or selfish, and lower their mood.

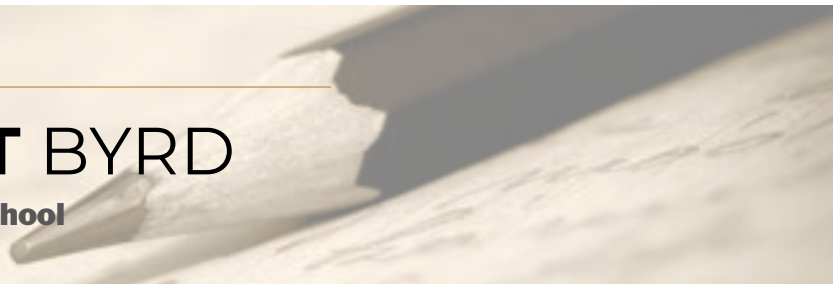
What can I do about youth violence? I can help with youth violence by reassuring people that they are worth it and that I appreciate their existence. This would help a couple people that feel like they're not worth enough and don't like their life. They mean the world to a lot of people and are loved by a lot of people. I can also tell them that they are pretty or handsome no matter what anybody says because God created their face so it wouldn't be their fault if other people don't think they are good looking. You can also be very kind to others to make them feel welcomed. Being kind to other people can probably be the best part of their day a lot of people get left out now days in these little groups Even if you don't like them you can still show some type of love and respect for other, because at the end of the day were all going to need each other to save yourself and to save the world. Some people may commit youth violence after being bullied and feel like they're not loved, which is basically a sum of emotion and mental health, social rejection, and family environment. Well that's how violence has affected my life. Has it affected you? If so, then how?



ESSAY 3

ALBERT BYRD

Wilson Middle School



About 19.2% of students ages 12-18 enrolled in grades 6-12 experienced bullying nationwide during the 2021-2022 school year according to Stopbullying.gov. Other people getting are bullied because they might have nice clothes or be rich or people accuse of them being ugly. The person bullying might think they are funny or cool but it is not. The people getting bullied be might diagnosed with depression which might cause suicidal thoughts and it might make them start doing alcohol, drugs or/and tobacco.

Violence is alive and well here in Youngstown, Ohio. I see it on the news and outside everyday even at school. People bully others, they name call, they hit, shove, even spit on other people some time. This violence has to stop! Kids are more depressed and even scared to come to school. About 33% of high school students reported that their mental health was not good “most or all of the time” in 2023. Often these people are depressed because

of bullying or violence. Say no to violence. Change starts with us. Strive to resolve differences and conflicts at home, work and in your communities peacefully through dialogue and compassion. Treat others with respect, practice empathy and promote understanding. We could ban guns and alcohol and drugs from the streets. If we don't make a change what does the future hold for us?

Young people commit of violence and bullying because they might have childhood trauma and easy access to weapons. They also have easy access to cyber bullying. And that's why parents should not give their young children devices at a young age. And parents should have a safe for their weapons so their kids don't comment suicide. And the parents should be watching their kids and not let them watch bad or scary stuff.

If we do these things we can STOP all this bullying and violence. The time is now, young people are dying, we can't afford to lose one more person. This needs to stop.



ESSAY 4

GABRIELLA CRUZ-MALDONADO

Rayen Early College Middle School

Youth violence and bullying has affected my life in many different forms. Violence has taken over society and will just keep getting worse. I've been through bullying and I know how it feels, especially in grade 3. In third grade I went through a phase, caused by bullying. I was insecure, not confident and shy. Many people just let it be, others joined the bullying. Eventually years passed and bullying settled. I got accepted to Rayen early college middle school for 5th grade and I didn't get bullied. I actually started to fit in. Bullying wasn't a huge thing in RECMS, so I actually started liking it and I made new friends. Friends that are real, friends that are kind, and friends that I know will lead me in a good path. However, youth bullying isn't only my story. Bullying can be seen in many people around you, which can also affect my life and where my future can go, who I can trust. Violence can affect your life in many ways. And it has affected many peoples life and has hurted them, maybe even give them thoughts of suicide. People think that violence is a way of getting stress out or just getting rid of that pain that they got in their hearts. It feels sharp, feels dull, feels empty, with no one to hug, no one to look upon and that's how someone may feel. Someone's family member passed away due to a violence act. That person feels weak when their favorite person is gone. Their environment looks different, the atmosphere looks dark, their daily hangout dies, their favorite song once was happy, now it's sad because it reminds them how violence is a horrible thing. This is how violence can affect not just mine but many others' lives.

The causes of youth violence are many. Violence is usually caused by family or friends passing away, getting abused, seeing a family member go through a hard time, seeing a family member get abused, etc. There are many people who do violence and do it because something's missing in them or they have the feeling, they feel empty, they don't

know why there doing it but they do it, they get influence to do it. And that's another big thing in violence and bullying. The influence that people go through pressing on to them the spotlight that they put you under. People don't always handle that just by themselves, they put other people under that spotlight and bullying becomes a thing in their life. Influence and not famous people influencers, influence around people. The group influences, social media influence, or even thoughts of not wanting to have to deal with the pain they're going through. People that rather do violence to look "cool". It's not just about that, if you need help don't hesitate to tell anyone, but be careful who you trust. Make sure you tell the RIGHT person, because sometimes you feel like people don't help you go through the hard times, but I promise if you tell the RIGHT person you will feel the peace and helpfulness you need.

I can think of many different ways to reduce or stop violence in my community and school. One main thing I have always thought about is by introducing the people who do the bullying or who get bullied to a session of just them, or hearing advice. that will lead them and give them the words that they need to hear. We can be nice which doesn't cost a lot, we can open up doors that they thought they could never open by working as a team, nobody's alone. We need to work as one, even though we're individual with personal lives which we all get we got duties, task, responsibilities now that we're older it gets hard, and don't forget violence isn't for older people, younger people feel it and people need to get that young people have feelings and we want to help with that. We want to open doors for all the people older to younger, younger to the older. We're here for you, don't express yourself by violence we're going to open doors, just let yourself go and open your hand. If we work as a group, as a community we will reach what we have to reach.

ESSAY 5

NAYELIS ESTERAS

Rayen Early College Middle School



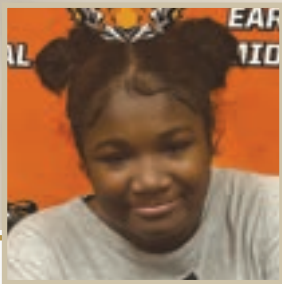
Youth violence and bullying has made a huge difference in life. It has also made a difference in my life because I've experienced bullying. When I was in 3rd grade I was bullied because I have eczema. They would say I looked weird because of my skin and they called me different. It was really bad and it really affected my self-esteem and it made me feel sad and insecure about my eczema and how it looked on my skin, because of my insecurity of eczema I use to cover myself up with layers of clothing. Another reason I was bullied was because I am Puerto Rican and they would bully my language and mocked me for it. They would also tell me to go eat some rice and chicken and they would call me rude names.

I think the main causes of youth violence are because they are influenced by other scholars or just people around who they might hang out with or forced to bully someone. They can also be mentally ill and they don't know what they are doing. For example their parents not treating their children well can cause them to use violence or bully others. Child abuse can all so lead to the child using violence against others from seeing their parents use that violence on them. For example someone who has been drinking alcohol or is doing drugs or both, can also make them aggressive and violent. Most people that bully others are probably insecure about themselves, either they are having family problems, or they are jealous about the person they are bullying.

Some ways we can reduce youth violence is by treating everyone the same even if they are different. Embrace being different because not everyone is the same or perfect. By being kind to everyone and getting along with everyone. If you see someone bullying another person, tell a trusted adult. Educate students about bullying and teach them that it's wrong to bully someone else and create a safe community and an environment at school and outside of school. encourage people to try new things and help them boost their confidence about themselves. If you are being bullied, talk to a counselor so you don't do self-harm. If someone is provoking you or messing with you trying to make you use violence just walk away or if someone is bullying you just walk away and tell a teacher or a parent.

In conclusion, youth violence and bullying has made a huge difference in life. You should never use any type violence or bullying because they are never the answer. Never bully someone because you wouldn't want that to be you if you get bullied. You wouldn't want to have depression, anxiety, mental illness, or do self-harm etc. like other people that get bullied because most people that get bullied have these issues. You never know what someone else is going through, those little jokes you make about them can really affect how they live, and their trust in others.





ESSAY 6

LANIA GILFORD

Rayen Early College Middle School

Red spider Lilly: death

Spider lilly oh spider Lilly can't you see?
Your everywhere around the world
Even in front of me
Even if I don't want you right now
Even if I'm terrified
You slowly creep up
As a beautiful flower in disguise
Red and delicate, pretty as can be
Yet your dark meaning ruins your scene

Spider Lilly oh spider Lilly can't you see?
your everywhere around the world
even in front of me
death can happen in many ways
like homicide, suicide, violence,

illnesses, over doses, accidental,
and our favorite, old age
but the world is deadly and hurtful
so unfortunately old age isn't so
common as it should be
Spider Lilly oh spider Lilly can't you see?
Your everywhere around the world
even in front of me
these terrible causes are caused
because of the people around us
But they are just doing what they seen
influenced by the people around them

Spider Lilly oh spider Lilly can't you see?
Your spreading everywhere
around the world,
And yes I mean everywhere

Because of you flower
the world seems so bare
won't you just spare me?
and when my time comes I'll leave,
When you think of death
You think dark and scary
But some people's lives are just like that
And that's was makes people want to
Make violence to other people
And even to themselves

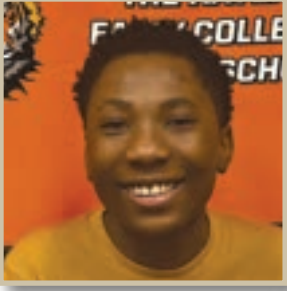
Spider Lilly oh spider Lilly can't you see?
Your everywhere around the world
even in front of me
Because of violence
Spider Lillie's are everywhere
And one day
Spider Lillie's will be
All you see

Red Spider Lilies represent death and forever goodbyes. Our world is so destructive and violent that Red Spider Lilies are normalized and all over our world. The cause of death is supposed to be peaceful and natural, but because of all the violence death seems scary and dark. Bullying is one of the reasons why we have so much spider lilies. Bullying has affected so many lives including my own. Because of bullying people (mostly children) has committed self harm and even suicide. Another violent act is domestic violence. Domestic violence has become so normalized that even the people that's suppose to help, looks over it.

Physical abuse is normalized too but the most looked over abuse it verbal and mental abuse. It happens a lot and not in just relationships but in friendships too. An example

of friendships being abusive is when you pick on your friends and cover it up by saying, "oh, I was just joking" or "I was just playing don't take it personal". It's all fun and games until you actually start feeling hurt by the things your "friends" say or do. And the sad thing is that you are so use to the abuse that you don't even consider it as abusive or don't even realize that your being abused.

What our community can do to reduce violence and abuse is to just be kind and set boundaries with people to show that you don't like the way your being treated or you don't find it funny. We can all make a difference on our community and hopefully everyone can have a positive experience in life because time moves too fast to just be spreading negativity.



ESSAY 7 | AMBASSADOR

JOSIAH JACKSON

Rayen Early College Middle School

Emma is a 10 year old girl. After her grandmother passed she moved from house to house. In the 4th grade she got bullied about her looks and clothes. At the age of 11 she went to her aunt's house to live. That's when violence began in her life. During the summer her aunt would go to work all day. When she was gone Emma, her siblings and cousins would clean the house. When her aunt got home she would yell at them saying they didn't do a good job with cleaning the house. The Wi-Fi would get turned off as a punishment. This would happen almost every day until school started and it got worse.

When school started her aunt and her brother Sam got into an argument and it got violent. At school that day Emma could not focus on her work. Her teacher noticed and asked if she was okay and she said yes. Because she and her brother were so close when her brother said he wanted to go to his grandparents house, she wanted to go. Emma doesn't have as many family members as her brother so she didn't know where to go. The violence was mental but it still hurt badly.

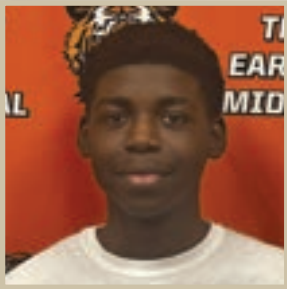
When Emma moved to her uncle's house she liked it at first. A week in, Emma and her uncle got into an argument. The arguments started to happen every day until one day Emma left and went on a walk. Her uncle chased her and she wouldn't stop, so he called the police. The police scared her so she got into her uncle's car, and when the police came her uncle told them to let her cool off. So they left. After that she cried all night and went to school the next day and acted like nothing happened. She played it

cool and no one noticed.

Emma ran away from home one other time and the same thing happened but she came back. She couldn't talk to her family so she fell into a depressed state. She would cry for hours and every chance she got she would call her siblings. Her uncle and god mom started to get into fights and Emma would try to get the little kids to safety. So they will not have to hear anything from their parents. Emma has understood what violence was since she was little and now she understands it better.

Emma has lived with her uncle for 2 years. It was the best and worst decision she made. The bad part was that she saw violence every day multiple times a day. Even though all that violence happened she went to school and every one one would never know. She would go and hand out compliments to every one that she sees. She got good grades and never got in trouble. Only one of her friends knows about what happens at home. She shares kindness with other people. She might not show it but she gets very tired and needs sleep.

Some reasons why violence will happen. One is that some people might not have what others have. Second is because of stuff that has been going on at home and they think it is normal. Third is that some might not know if it was right or wrong. Some ways to stop youth violence. Know what is right and wrong. Don't always do what you see. Become the best person you can possibly be. Don't be someone who uses violence.



ESSAY 8

ZY'AYER MITCHELL

Rayen Early College Middle School

Youth violence and bullying has affected my life in many ways that I could never imagine throughout most of my life. I have been bullied by people no matter if it's social media or real life, but I feel as if it also shaped me to be the man I am today by giving me a burst of motivation. Bullying has made me lose love and confidence for myself many times. I feel as if I'm not involved with youth violence but I know people who are.

I feel as if youth violence is often caused by influence throughout the internet or even people they know. Certain rappers often have lyrics in their songs that may cause children to do the things that's labeled in songs. Sometimes even certain videos they watch may influence them to go down a path they don't have to, which can be throwing their potential away. Also, certain video games like Fortnite, Grand theft auto, and call of duty may contain violence which might influence children to do it and find it cool. They might also have a bad group of people around them who might instigate a lot and get them into fights that may resort to gun violence. Some other cause to youth violence is certain social media apps people often make trends which make everyone else do them so certain dances and songs on Tik-Tok and other platforms may cause people to behave differently especially if their watching the wrong things at a young age because younger children are most likely to be influenced by something or someone they often look for people to look up to. It can also be caused by certain households they live in that might not get the right treatment or attention they need and which may

cause trauma or anger which may resort to violence or living the wrong way. I know a couple of people who had bright futures in front of them but wasted it because they decided to go down the wrong path to impress others or try to have something to prove when they don't need to live that way to be successful or to impress people. When you don't always have to try to show off to fit in for others, when you don't have to prove yourself to people if they can't see your worth then that's on them. So, for most of those people indeed up in jail or are in jail currently. A lot of people also grew up without a father figure or mother figure in their lives which may resort to them not being properly educated on what's wrong and what's right so they follow after friends, older cousins or siblings, and influencers. Which may cause them to do the wrong thing; they might have them as an accomplice to do bad things with them.

What I can do to reduce youth violence is be cautious of my words and actions. Don't bully or be disrespectful to others for no reason. Don't talk bad about people behind their back that could be offensive. I can also be a leader and try to stop my friends from getting themselves in trouble by starting drama and causing violence physical. I can also try to reduce it by making posts about stopping youth violence and spreading peace throughout my community.

So another way to reduce youth violence is watching who you are around and who is in your circle because they can lead you down the wrong path which can mess up your future and hurt your career.



ESSAY 9

DAWN TAYLOR

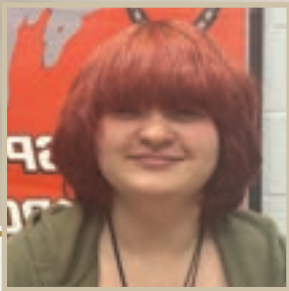
Rayen Early College Middle School

Youth violence and bullying has affected my life because of what I've been through, been around, and saw at a young age that I wasn't supposed to. Some of my uncles and aunts have been in violent situations that had a lot of consequences and left me with trauma and I still think about it from time to time. Youth violence is something that's very much common because a parent can get their kids into dangerous stuff in the streets because of gangs that they're in and it's been multiple occasions that kids have gotten shot and killed all over the world and they're still young, they don't deserve to die so soon because they barely even got to grow up and live their lives God gave them. My 3 year old baby brother once shot himself back in 2019 on August 26 after he had found my uncle's gun that wasn't put up, under the couch where it was reachable. It should've never been in reach of him, especially if my uncle knew that there were a lot of kids at my grandma's house playing in the same room the gun was in and he didn't hide the gun well enough. The bullet left him with a wound on his left hand between his fingers because he got grazed after he shot himself. I'm just glad that the bullet didn't hit anywhere else in his body that could've killed him and I don't understand how he pulled the trigger with his little 3 year old hands. He had a cask on too for a couple of months and after that, his finger healed. Today, he has a bump from the bullet and his finger is a little crooked, so I ask him about how his hands are feeling because I think about the fact that he got shot when he was just a baby and get in my feelings because I can't imagine the pain that he felt and it should've never occurred in the first place and sometimes I get mad at myself and feel guilty for running out the front door when I heard the gun go off instead of holding my brother while he was crying and bleeding.

The causes of youth violence is aggression, poor parental supervision, or harsh discipline. Sometimes, parents let their children do anything and everything they want without rules and curfew and that's the problem with kids nowhere, they think that they're grown but in reality they're still kids who got a lot of time to grow up doing whatever they want, but for now they have to go by their parents rules and whatever they say should go. When parents allow their children to go out late at night to parties, walk

around, or with their friends something bad could happen and that could end up being violence. A party could get shot up while someone's kid is in there all because the parents let their child go out late at night and they're still minors they should be in the house at night. I think that people start violent interactions with others because either they are mentally unstable, or are just having a thought of doing something wrong and bad. You really never know what's going on in a person's mind and you can never tell until the action unfolds. In school, violence usually occurs in the lunchroom, hallways, bathroom, and definitely the classroom. Drama always happens in those 4 rooms because of the situations that go left and the students that take matters into their own hands, and that's fighting, stabbing, or arguing. Verbal and physical fights start because of pettiness between two students or even regular people, and that can lead to a bad reaction. I do think that it is okay to hit someone back because they hit you. It's called self defense, you can't just let nobody put their hands on you without you doing it back, but sometimes it can go to a whole other level.

I can foster positive environments, support youth through education and mentorship, and teach conflict resolution and social emotional skills. I can also teach people that it's okay to not always react to things that aren't serious and you can walk away from a lot of things that don't need time put into it. Everybody needs to be set on the right path and come to an understanding in the same book and on the same page. The world would be so much better without violence because everybody would be positive, nobody would have to get arrested or be killed, and nobody would think about doing the wrong things but the right ones. God is the only one able to help us with the issue of violence because he watches over us and protects us no matter what situation we are in, he's always by our side. What I would recommend to my friend to my friend who likes to fight is to tell him/her to calm down and stop picking violence over just ignoring the situation because she/he is better than that. I don't think violence resolved any issues in my life because once I fought these 2 girls before, we still argue and I feel like fighting is pointless when nothing is going to change.



ESSAY 10

RAEGHAN WOLF

Chaney Middle School

Youth violence affects everybody whether they know it or not. Youth violence has affected my life in various ways. A way that violence has struck upon my life and others was a tragedy on April 26, 2022. This was an ordinary day. I had woken up at 7:30 to get ready for a day at school when I was in elementary school. I was in about 4th grade at this time. After school I came home. As soon as I got home I went to my little brother's bus stop. We had gotten into the house. My little brother had told me he was hungry and wanted something to eat. We were sitting on the floor waiting for his food to be done. We all heard very loud bangs. Next thing we know my sister ran into the kitchen yelling at us to 'get down and don't make a singular noise. Shortly after my cousin slammed the door shut she ran into the kitchen. My first reaction was to grab my brother and sit with my body covering his. We were both crying on the floor. I was trying to comfort him. When all the noise had stopped my sister grabbed my phone to call the police. She was just screaming out our address. We opened the door to find blood everywhere and a car in the front yard riddled in bullets.

They were a family of four. They were all shot except for the little boy. My next-door neighbor tied off the mothers legs, her daughter was grazed in her leg and the dad was shot in the head. The only thing that little boy was saying was that my daddy's dead, he got shot in the head. I was trying to comfort the little boy since his little sister went to the hospital with their mom but I couldn't speak. No words would come out of my mouth. I was just crying.

Another way that youth violence has affected my life is my childhood friend. My friend Trea'von Hopkins, him and his sister were a victim of gun violence on August 19, 2023. He was visiting his mother in Erie, Pennsylvania when his sister's

boyfriend murdered him and his sister, and then took his own life. He lived with his grandmother in Youngstown and worked at Save a Lot for a summer program. He saved up his money all summer. His grandmother reluctantly let him go to his mothers his sister and he got shot by his sister's boyfriend and after shooting them he had shot himself. I found out from my friend that I thought he was joking but I was scared that he might have actually passed away shortly after I found out he wasn't joking. The only thing I could do was cry.

I stayed in my room the rest of the day. You may be asking yourself what are the causes of youth violence. There are countless reasons somebody might commit youth violence. Some of the reasons may be because of drugs, family, abuse, gun violence, traumatic responses and many more. For example, there are many families who sell drugs and their food stamps to get money or drugs. There are a lot of abusive families that do not care about their children, and remind them of that which could be a reason that gun violence is committed.

There are people selling illegal substance and firearms to people who do not need these like children and mentally ill people. Abuse could be a relation to youth violence as abuse could be a traumatic response to something from their past.

There are many things us young kids can do to stop youth violence, like stop participating in it. I can reduce youth violence by not participating in it. can talk to younger people about youth violence, being bad and nobody should participate in it. I could make posters, poems and many

more about youth violence, and how it took my friend and his sister. I can speak up or tell a trusted adult if I see something bad happening. There are many things us young people can do to stop youth violence so it doesn't take any other lives.





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