

Focus on Building Community

Our third annual Student Voices Project brought in the creative works of over 150 middle school and high school students from seven schools and educational venues in five different U.S. states. We selected 16 honorees whose submissions are featured here. This year's theme of Building Community was introduced as follows:

We are all connected and we all need each other. The Friends community testimony is fundamentally about responding to the needs of others, both within one's immediate circle and in the extended human family. A healthy community encourages sharing, caring, authenticity, respect, and fellowship among the individuals that make up the larger group. In this environment, members can look to the group for wisdom and support, allowing collective experience to increase the strength, vision, and creativity of each person.

We supplied the students with four prompt options to choose from, touching on the various aspects of living or participating in community. Look for the options in word bubbles on the following pages, including five visual art pieces placed throughout. Lastly, starting on page 17 you will find a complete list of all 153 students who participated in the project this year. We thank you for sharing your work with us. Until next year, keep learning, writing, and creating!

Prompt

Think of a community you're a part of or one that you've observed and respond to one of the four options using words, art, or photography.

Option 1

What are the important elements of building a loving, safe, and supportive community? How do you contribute to maintaining these elements in your community?



How to Define Community

*Katie Levy, Grade 6,
Sidwell Friends School*

"Define community," I hear my teacher say. All around me, students start scribbling furiously. Some run to the dictionaries, but my thoughts whirl around just two words: define community? How can you define something so abstract and complex? A

dictionary alone cannot even begin to capture the essence of community. In fact, to really define community, you'd need to dive in.

Find a new community, one that you don't already belong to, and observe. Watch how every member treats one another with respect and kindness. See the initial discomfort between the members begin to dissolve and melt away. Study the way that each small misunderstanding leads to smiles and laughs. Look closely at the feeling of security, that safeness, but don't forget the struggles.

Scrutinize the flashes of the eyes, the forced smiles, and the strained laughs. Pay attention to the slightly raised voices, on the threshold of a shout. Keep an eye on those tense moments of rivalry, where the bystanders freeze and the participants pause, shaking slightly. Note how few community members go out of their way to avoid conflict. Realize that some conflict is inevitable.

Witness the moments when someone backs down. Mark the second when they suddenly realize it's not worth it. Observe how they stop themselves, often mid-phrase, and politely agree. Recognize when they move along, ashamed, pretending that nothing happened. These moments are common yet invaluable to a good community.

"All right, you should be finishing up by now," the teacher says. Students sigh and pass their sheets forward. I quickly jot down some notes about kindness and respect, and pass up my own. But my mind still revolves around those two words. I see myself trapping that word, that word *community*, and snaring its lifeblood to impose onto paper. I envision myself truly defining community.

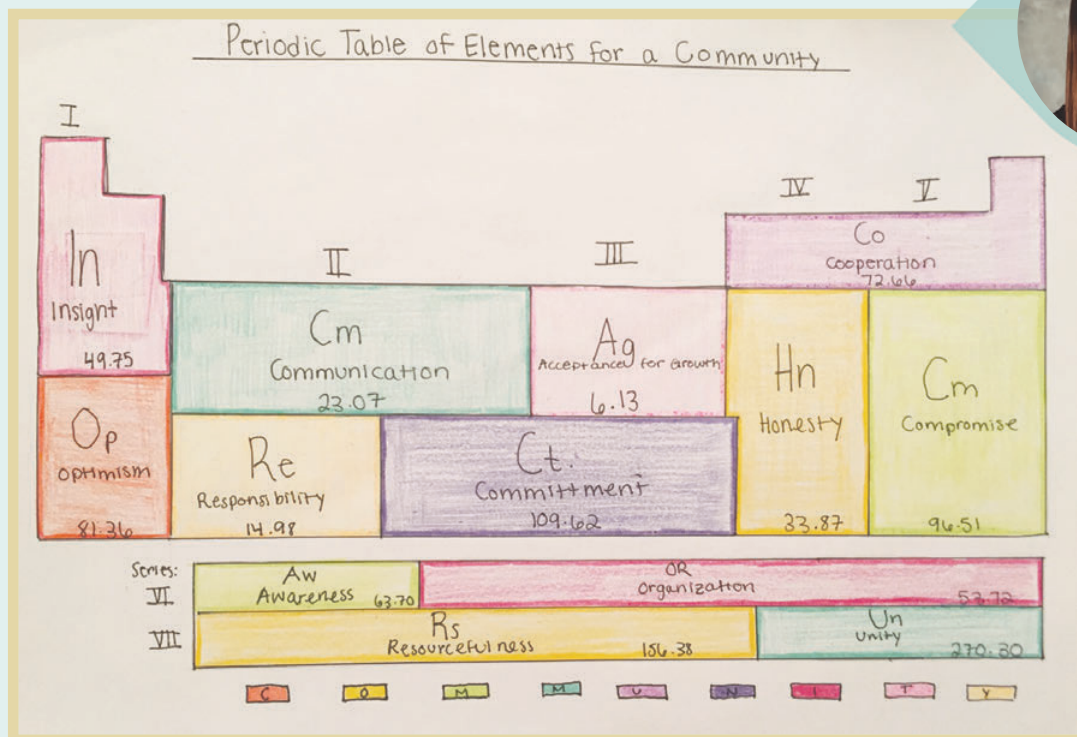
Come to my school, walk into my homeroom. You will start to notice. Peek through the window of my math class; slip through the doors of my Chinese class. There it is again! Sneak into science; stay quiet in the library. Spot

those glimpses, those tiny flashes, of something much, much bigger. The colossal idea again.

We all have that special part of us: that thrill at an inside joke; that feeling when you look up from a task and see someone else looking up too; that shared awareness when you've been working as one seamless unit for hours, tirelessly, never once considering giving up; that simple pleasure when someone finishes your thought exactly, and you both turn and smile because good minds think alike! We all have our communities, and that concludes my definition. □

Periodic Table of Elements for a Community

Natalie Neumann, Grade 9, Westtown School



To create a loving, safe, and supporting community, there must be meaning in everything we do.

Each person works toward a common, greater goal, and each person thrives off the others. The elements that create this kind of community are insight, optimism, communication, responsibility, acceptance for growth, commitment, honesty, cooperation, compromise, awareness, organization, unity, and resourcefulness. All of these elements connect with each other. The relationship between these elements is that they all bounce off of each other in a cause-and-effect way. For example, when communicating your ideas in a group, you learn to compromise and

work toward one outcome.

In my community, I contribute to maintaining these elements by involving myself in the action. When the time is right, I voice my opinion, provide ideas to the problems that we try to resolve, and ultimately work toward a common goal with my fellow peers. When I do this, it helps keep the flow of the community going and helps provide support to maintain the goal and efforts of others. The elements of a community are crucial pieces to a place and experience where everyone works hand-in-hand. Community doesn't function with just one person or thing, but is a collage of many different mixes. □



Nature: The Community of God

Tony Chen, Grade 9, Westtown School

There are times when I walk into a grove in the forest and see all these creatures vigorously and robustly conducting their lives yet interacting with one another so peacefully and tranquilly. The birds are tweeting; the leaves are shuffling; the brooks are rolling. There stands a doe, fixing her impenetrable vision on me as if she is telling a story of the silent forest that grows around us.

There I have a vision of the far ancient memory of our planet. Back then, there were only trees and waters covering the surface of our planet, the mother of earth. It was primitive, rough as well as dangerous in the wilderness of nature. But, as I remember, it was not evil. No, no evil. Surely creatures consumed one another for survival. However, as I looked back, I saw no violence but harmony, like a symphony played by the orchestra of the grand nature. It is in this way that everything—all

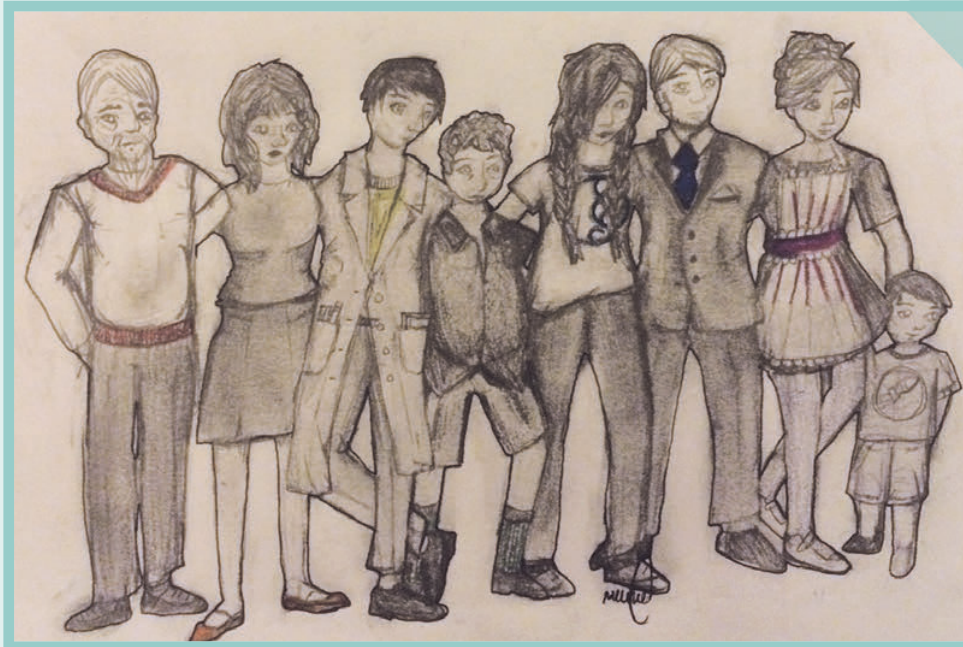
living creatures—survived and prospered infinitely without an end.

As I roamed about within those lofty trees so high that they plunged into the sky, there was a feeling, an emotion that sprung from my heart, from my very essential being that I am not alone again. I seemed to be in a river, a life stream where I was flowing with millions of millions of others like countless plankton, together toward the very end. Right at that moment, I felt that I needed defense no more but only trust, a firm belief that the stream all of us are in will carry us to the ultimate purpose.

It was the community of God. It was just exactly the community of God that weighed down all man-made artificial community, where conflicts exist but harmoniously. This must sound so strange but believe me, it is always possible for conflict to exist peacefully and harmoniously, only if we be a part of one another. □

One Community, Many People

Reena Bradley, Grade 9, Westtown School



In a community, a group needs diverse and unprejudiced people in order to achieve unity and understanding.

Without different ideas and opposing concepts, a community would not be able to move forward and grow like a garden to spread ideas or even understand other groups. Communities need to accept different and

Without acceptance of different or diverse ideas, the community would be unable to function or make decisions that benefit the group due to lack of agreement. Therefore, a community needs both a diverse set of people and a nonjudgmental mentality, or else the community can never grow and make a difference. □



diverse ideas in order to agree, make decisions, and function. Although a community needs to have a variety of different people, it might also need a great deal of unprejudiced people, because we, as people, have different ideas, and we need to be able to understand those ideas without bias so we can have empathy and understanding. If there were to be a lack of open-minded people, the communities would be unable to grow.

Option 2

What are some ways to support and care for each member of your community?

How do you help out when someone is in need? How do you make newcomers feel welcome in your community?



Untouched

Aviva Wright, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School

**Ruby Bridges and I live on different strands of the spider web.
She was a brave black six-year-old girl who integrated schools.
Her heart must have pounded,
like a zebra's, when chased by lions.
She let nothing stop her to be herself.
I will let nothing stop me to be myself.
I will find my place, in this new space.**

**Driving up the driveway to my old school,
my eyes squinted as I arrived at a sunlit castle.
Kids in lines, filing down the hall like they were on a track.
A cozy corner where I knew every nook and cranny.
Tall, short, boys, girls, white and black.
Not like at William Frantz Elementary School, Ruby's school.
This was the first strand of the web I have been on.**

**As I walk up the steps to my new school,
a huge wooden and glass, modern building.
A swarm of kids rush down the hall like they are in a race.
A big place where I didn't know anything or anyone.
Tall, short, boys, girls, white and black.
Not like at William Frantz Elementary School, Ruby's school.
Now I am on a new strand, the old one gone.**

**A new place is like an untouched spider web,
So many different directions to move in, and
new things for me to explore.
As I grasp on, as I cling to the nearest strand,
I am moving like a spider from place to place.
Uncertain as to where I am going,
So many paths for me to discover.**

This poem is about going to a new school. It was hard for me in the beginning, but I stayed true to myself and I made new friends. When I was at my old school, I tried hard to reach out to a new student. When someone is new to your community, it really helps them if you welcome them into your group. Someone can be in need of feeling welcome and sometimes it can be hard to help them. How can you keep your old friends and make new ones? That is something I struggle with, and I still do not know the full answer.

My metaphor is a spider web because in a spider web there is a center with many strands coming out of it. When you go somewhere new and different, you have a choice of which way to go. You can hang out with different people, and eat with different kids at lunch. Also, depending on the experiences you have, they can lead you to different beliefs and values, which can make you a different person. Depending on which choices you make, you can become a different person, but you can always crawl back and start over. In my poem, when I say, "As I grasp on, as I cling to the nearest strand," what I mean is you have to experiment with different strands by climbing from one way to another. How do you know what your place is? I don't know the full answer to this either, but I will keep trying to discover the answer, by traveling on different strands.

Community is like a spider web because a spider web is super strong and a community can be too. Spider webs can break, just like a community. Communities can also break when people are mean to others in their communities. Communities are elastic—they can expand to let new people in, but can also close in to fight as a group. One spider web makes a community, but many make a force. ▣



Happy to Be There

Layla Dawit, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School

“And so the boy climbed up the tree, and gathered her apples, and carried them away. And the tree was happy.”
—Shel Silverstein in *The Giving Tree*

“Come on, Layla! We’re going now!” my mom said. “We’re dropping you off at Caleb’s house!” My mom and dad were going to a fundraising event that would last late through the night, and they had decided to drop me off somewhere instead of leaving me alone in the house. I grinned, excited once again to see my God-brother. I walked quickly from the car to his door, a spring in my step, not taking time to enjoy the last hues of summer, soon to fade away. I was looking forward to spending time with him, as I would for all of the members of my Ethiopian community, and for me, that was worth more than those colors. I knocked, waiting expectantly, only to hear that he was with some of his friends at school, as it was their annual carnival. I hid a sigh as I entered, as I did not want to take away time from his friends, but I missed him.

Just then, I heard the sound of two pairs of footsteps coming from what seemed to be the garage door. They revealed themselves to be Caleb and his dad, Adane. He had heard that I had come over, and requested to leave his friends immediately to see me and spend time with me. I was overjoyed to see him, and touched that he had wanted to spend time with me over his friends.

From that day I knew that although I may not know soccer stats or who is on what team as well as he does, it was as if he were the tree and I the boy. Like the tree, he was happy to give me his time, his love, and his compassion; and like the boy, I embraced it. That’s what made a difference. That day I felt something nagging at me. Maybe it was the smile I gave him or the hug, radiating pure love from both of us, but I kept thinking about it over and over again: the fact that spending time with me was truly important to him. That day I knew that we were friends; and although “friends” is a general word, we were the closest kind, the kind that loves each other. We were like a little community of our own, a small part of the larger Ethiopian group.

I knew that this act of kindness had come from a bond that stretched back to childhood, to times we had spent together as members of the Ethiopian American community, a community that I have known for as long as I can remember. Endless pillow fights, attempts at the Ethiopian language, with laughter filling the room. A place where I can truly be myself, no secrets withheld. A comfortable place. A place where we are always there for each other, connected for life. Where we help each other in times of need, and repay with kindness. Never the tumbleweed, rolling away in a barren desert, for together, like the tree and the boy, we are happy. Always happy. □

Out of the Snow

Ella Majd, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School

I remember the first time I walked into my grandmother’s temple. It wasn’t the snow outside that left me frozen; it was what I saw inside. Beds, lined up in rows. Food and laughter and medical care. There was an overwhelming sense of relief that the homeless people gathered wouldn’t be making pillows of snow tonight. Kids, playing board games and reading to the homeless people, their smiles illuminating the entire room. Sounds of ripping paper, opening presents. It was Christmas, and no matter what religion you were, it was too cold and too sad to spend that time outside, alone. It didn’t matter to my grandmother, who had arranged the event, that this was a Christian holiday. It didn’t matter to her that these people weren’t Jewish. To her they were people—cold, hungry, sad, lonely people who

deserved to be happy and healthy and warm.

At first I felt a little out of place. I don’t usually go to temple. I didn’t know these strangers. Within minutes, the contagious warmth and joy spread to me, and I ran around, reading and playing board games with everyone. They were all so kind, so jubilant, so thankful to be warm and safe. Some of them shared such sad stories, like one man who didn’t know where his four-year-old daughter or his wife was. I didn’t know what to say to him. He seemed thankful and lonely at the same time. Our company couldn’t fill the empty place for his family, but we were there to comfort him. At least he could pull the jacket we gave him around his shoulders, protected from the cold that cuts like swords, and think of them.



Everyone in here was safe from the cold, under blankets and drinking hot chocolate. It was amazing.

Humanity is a community. Why do we sometimes act like it isn't? My grandmother and her temple open up every year around the holidays for these people, and every year they come and eat and talk and laugh. It was a great feeling helping at the temple. I felt as if I really was part of something bigger, like a school of fish swimming through the ocean. It's beautiful to see people

helping other people and caring for them for nothing except their happiness in return, as if they could put happiness in a box and wrap it like one of the presents on the floor. The homeless people were there for each other, making them laugh and hugging. They were all putting aside their troubles for each other. They were kind, caring, loving, and genuinely curious about who I was as a person. Those things, to me, are the building blocks of community. □

A Sixth-grade Quaker View of the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Miller Gentry-Sharp, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School

The Syrian refugees should be let into the United States. The United States is a large community in itself. There is no reason not to allow them in. In this essay, I will talk about why it is necessary for them to be let in for the grand community. The refugees can bolster the economy, add diversity to the communities, and from a humanistic standpoint, it is the right thing to do. The refugees should be allowed into America because allowing them in is important to building a safe, loving community.

The community aspect of the crisis is very clear. We need to not only accept them but welcome them. The principle of community is that everyone is included. We are closing our doors to people who have gone through so much suffering. Your pre-k teacher always told you to include everyone. Well, this is what the United States and the European countries need to do now. Not letting the refugees in is downright exclusion.

Welcoming the refugees is important to building community in the United States. We need to prove that everyone is welcome into our community. The refugees will also add a lot of diversity to our community by giving us culture that we have not experienced before. Our communities would change and grow if we accept the refugees. Welcoming the refugees is a way that we can build our community. The other Quaker testimonies also provide reasons to let in the Syrian refugees.

The second Quaker testimony is peace. There is a lot of turmoil around the refugee crisis that will only end if we let all of the refugees into our country and welcome them. Peace requires everyone to be safe. The only way the refugees will be safe is if they are given proper shelter and support. This is another reason why the refugees should be welcomed. The refugee crisis started due to a war. Only a peaceful solution will solve the crisis.

The Quaker testimony of equality is very important. The idea that while we are sleeping in beds inside warm houses, waking up one morning each year to many knick knacks and toys sitting under a tree in our house, traveling across the world for fun, there are others sleeping in tents with almost nothing, waiting for some rich politician to announce whether or not they are allowed to travel on a large, open area of land is atrocious. This is equality: letting everyone have an opportunity to succeed no matter who they are or what their backgrounds are.

Integrity is another Quaker testimony that means doing the right thing. We are in a very important position right now. It is obvious what the countries must do. We have to welcome the refugees. If we don't, we will always be remembered for the time we refused to do the right thing in an important situation.

The final Quaker testimony is stewardship. Good stewardship is being a good steward to the earth and others. Letting in the refugees is being good stewards of our smaller communities, humanity, and our fellow human beings. Letting the refugees in is being good stewards to our communities by allowing them to build and grow. It is being good stewards to humanity by improving the lives of millions. It is being good stewards to our fellow human beings by giving them a place to sleep that's not a tent on the border of a rich nation.

In conclusion, the refugees should be welcomed because welcoming the refugees is important to building community, promoting peace, maintaining equal rights, and being good stewards. Letting the refugees in is also the right thing to do. Think about what life would be like as a refugee, sitting on the border of a rich country, waiting to see if they will let you walk through. □



Option 3

What happens when there are differences or conflicts within a community?

How do we respond with patience, tolerance, and openness to building bridges?



Community Impact

*Madeleine Agudelo, Grade 6,
Greene Street Friends School*

Last year, I was new to Greene Street Friends School. I didn't know who to hang out with. So in the first week of school or so, during the recesses, I tried hanging out with many different groups of friends. After a little while of doing this, I found a group. We were together all the time. But we wouldn't let other people play games with us, and we were not allowed to make friends outside of the group. Our group name was M.E.S.M.A., one letter for each of our first names. We started book clubs, and with the book clubs it was nice because we would let other people join the club too. Then I stopped doing the book club, as well as many other people.

Later in the year, our group had some problems. Half of us wanted to step away from the group, and the other half wanted to keep the club just as it was. We had many discussions about this, and decided to keep our little club, but allow other people to play. We were still a club, but anyone else that wanted to play could play with us.

In the beginning of this school year, during our class trip, we finally stopped the group. We still are friends and hang out together, but we are not a club. It feels much better not to be a group, because you can be with the group when you want and you can be with other friends too. All of us like it better.

I think that it was very important to include people for many reasons: it feels better for me; it lets other people play; and you don't feel stuck. It feels better because you know you are doing a good thing. It's better for other people because if they want to play they can and if they don't they don't have to. Also, you don't feel stuck. Sometimes if you stay with the same group for so long, you feel that you are stuck. If you are free to go and play with other people, then this gives you some wiggle room. Doing this felt better for me, and it felt better for everyone.

It's important for us, and it's important for the whole school community to include. It is important because a community that doesn't let other people join is not a healthy, inclusive community.

If everyone includes everyone in the community, and even those not in the community, it makes everyone feel better. Thomas Jefferson said, "I believe that every human mind feels pleasure in doing good to another." I think that this quote means when you do good to others, you will feel good yourself. This practice can also reflect on the community; if you treat everyone with respect, you will feel better knowing that you did a good thing and you will be treated the same way. This way everyone will be a part of the bigger community, and the community will be kind and caring. This also goes for other communities besides the ones at school.

You can have many different communities, like at home, at school, or someplace else. You might be part of lots of small communities within a big community, just like I was part of M.E.S.M.A. So with everything you do with other people, think of it as a small community—sometimes within a bigger one, and sometimes just by itself. But when you think about it, there will always be a bigger community that you belong in, like your town, city, and country.

We are also part of one more community with everyone included: the earth. This community is not always peaceful, and not everyone treats others with peace, respect, and kindness. But if we do, it will make an impact. This impact will reflect on other people and even animals, then they just might start to do the same thing back.

I chose to write about an experience of my own because I think that it really represents community in a good way. Sometimes there are problems, and when they get solved, it makes me feel really good afterward. I thought that this would be a really good example of when there are problems in the community, it's really not that hard to solve them. □

Hands of Peace

*Heidi Suh, Grade 9,
Westtown School*

Pictured in this illustration is the shape of a star consisting of five hands of distinct ethnicities. I drew five hands all with peace signs, and they all form a star. I think this represents the community at Westtown since everyone is so diverse. This is also representative of Westtown since they are all making peace signs, and as a Quaker school, we are very peaceful. The hands are all different ethnicities to represent the diversity in Westtown. The hands form a big star, which shows that Westtown, with the help of everyone in the school, can form one big shape. Community is a feeling of fellowship between other individuals, and the five hands are uniting in a common purpose. This portrays how Westtown can band together to create something really great. The groups of people here are very diverse, and they all have amazing ideas, which can greatly contribute to the community. 



I'm a Muslim Too

Bilaal Degener, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School

My mom told me a story about when she dealt with ignorance from a kid in 2001 after the Twin Towers were struck down. Schools were closed because of the plane attacks. A fourth-grade teacher had to tell her students why they were missing school. She told them that some terrorists from a dangerous group in Afghanistan called al-Qaeda were suspected of crashing planes into the Pentagon and the Twin Towers.

All the kids were scared, but one kid said, "Why don't we just blow Afghanistan off the face of the earth so they don't come? Won't that end all the fighting in America?"

The teacher asked him, "Have you ever met someone from Afghanistan?"

"No," he grumbled in response.

"How about I invite someone from Afghanistan to have a talk with the class?" she offered politely.

My mom went to the class a few days later and shared with them many stories about all the fun experiences she had with her family growing up in Kabul, such as snow slides that her uncle built for the kids, the ice cream vendor that came down their block in the summer, and the delicious tomatoes and beautiful roses that grew in their garden. The boy realized that he made a mistake; he realized all children share the same fun times in the places they love the most.

When I heard this story, it reminded me of a time in class when we were learning about Muslims and their beliefs. A girl had heard about how Muslims have to pray, fast, and do all kinds of things which are much harder than just living a life without religion at all. The class thought that it was very hard to go on Hajj, but I



said it is a wonderful, once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Then one girl said, "Let's just get rid of the Muslims. They are all just terrorists anyway, right?"

I felt very offended by that comment so I announced, "I'm a Muslim too, and I'm not just going to terrorize this whole class!"

"You're a Muslim?" she asked

"Yes, I am a Muslim," I replied.

Two of my friends helped explain that Muslims are not horrible people that want to destroy the world. She said she was sorry and that she didn't mean to hurt my feelings.

Both of these stories showed me how we can be mindful of people around us and people everywhere. I commented to my mom that in both stories a kid thought poorly of Muslims and wanted to get rid of them; she agreed but also added that both people realized their mistake and apologized for what they said. From these two stories we can understand that to make our community feel as safe as possible, we need to respect other people's faiths, home countries, and religions because making this change could be a step to having peace in our community. □

Resolving Conflict in My Community

*Jack DeVuono, Grade 9,
Westtown School*

When there are differences or conflicts in my community, there are two phases that we go through every time. It starts off with harsh words—the kind where you do not even realize what you are saying until it is too late, and then you brood over what was said for the next couple of hours, days, even weeks. People will take proactive measures as well, such as setting up meetings, making big announcements, or going to local authority figures, like the school principal. This is how the ideas surrounding the difference spread.

At my school, we have a bulletin board called the Opinion Board where people in our community can share their thoughts. One day, someone posted on it the statement "Black Lives Matter" to go along with the movement. Another person responded with the words "All Lives Matter" right next to this. These two comments sparked an extreme amount of controversy in our school, and many unkind words and phrases were spoken throughout the campus. To move forward with this conflict, a group of students organized several meetings for business to talk about the subject. The group also brought the issue to the principal, a move which sparked more talk and direct action throughout our school. These words and actions represent phase one of when a new difference or conflict comes up in my community.

This is then soon followed by phase two, which

begins when each member finally gets everything out of their system and is able to take a breath, relax, and really put some thought into the subject at hand. It is during this time of discussion that we are then able to accept the difference or solve the conflict that has been tampering with the gears that run our community. We responded with everything needed to solve any problem: honesty, patience, openness, kindness, unity, and energy. We expressed these through talks, kind words, and apologies. And it worked! This is how the "Black Lives Matter" versus "All Lives Matter" conflict was solved at my school. We sat down in a room together and created a safe space where each person was allowed to openly state all thoughts, opinions, and emotions on the matter. Together, we were able to overcome this struggle. In the end, the conflict was overcome peacefully, and our community is stronger because of it. □



Photo by Lejia Zhao, Grade 9, Westtown School

Option 4

Share an example of a community working together to accomplish a greater goal. What happened and how was it made possible? What kind of roles did members play along the way?

Love Wins

*Sophia Florence, Grade 6,
Greene Street Friends School*

My art is the pride flag, but I made it my own. I created this for my art submission because it represents when a big community came together and fought for what is right, for same-sex marriage! This effort took a long time, but they did not just give up; they kept fighting. Finally others felt the same way, and they all came together and won! By coming together to fight for what was right, other people opened up to what was right, and the community just got bigger with lots of



communities all over fighting for the same reason. It made a great impact on lots of people all over the world.

I also decided on this issue because it is important to me and my family. We have good friends who could not get married; this win didn't just have an impact on them but also on my family. □



Soles4Souls

Sophie Adler, Grade 9, Westtown School

One of the times I have been deeply involved with a community working together was when I was in fifth grade at West Chester Friends School in West Chester, Pennsylvania. At the time, I was part of a girls' running club that met after school, and we decided that we wanted to do a service project. We chose to do our service for a nonprofit organization called Soles4Souls. This organization donates used shoes that are still in good condition to people in Third World countries. Many of these people do not have proper footwear. Our group watched a short video about the people that receive the donated shoes, and I remember wanting to help them immediately. There were only about eight girls in our running group, so we all split up with most girls working in pairs. Not

surprisingly, I worked with my best friend, Ellie.

Each pair was given a huge cardboard box to collect the donated shoes. We had to decide where to set up our box. Some girls set up their box at the grocery store, others at the running store. At the time, Ellie and I were both part of West Chester Meeting, so we decided to put our box there. I remember Ellie and I standing up at the end of meeting for worship to make an announcement about our project. It seemed like everyone agreed that this was a good cause. We had about three weeks to collect shoes. We constantly reminded people to bring in shoes. As the weeks went by, Ellie and I saw people bringing anywhere from one pair of shoes to three bags full. At the end of the three weeks, we were surprised to see that our box was full. We were also proud of our accomplishment.

I'll never forget the Friday afternoon when we all brought in our boxes. First we dumped the shoes in one giant pile. Next we had to find pairs of shoes, tie them together with rubber bands, and put them in a different pile. This process took about an hour and a half. We had tons of fun while working. We took advantage of the

many shoe options, trying on all of the heels we could find and attempting to walk across the gym. Finally all the shoes became a mountain, and we tallied all of the pairs. We collected 1,007 pairs of shoes, and the story was featured in the *Daily Local News*. This was a very memorable experience. □



If the Taxes Aren't Lowered, the City Is Going to Stop!

Carolina De Avila Castilho, Grade 11, Westtown School



In July 2013, with the increase of taxes in São Paulo, Brazil, people from all over the city went out in the streets to fight for a greater goal. The protest was primarily organized in opposition to a significant price increase for bus tickets, which would cause a huge impact, especially for the lower classes. Later on, however, more people from all different classes started to join in the protest to represent their own causes. They fought against corruption scandals; they fought against the bad quality of public hospitals and the lack of investment in education; they fought against the large amount of money that was used for construction for the 2014 World Cup and not for supporting the starving children in the *favelas* (Brazilian slums). Soon enough, people from every state of Brazil were in the streets, crying out

for a better place to live and fighting for their rights.

I was born and raised in Brazil, living there for 16 years before moving to Berwyn, Pennsylvania, to live with my aunt and uncle to attend Westtown School for a year.

In this drawing, I recreated a famous scene from the protest. On the board that the people are holding there is a warning: "If the taxes aren't lowered, the city is going to stop!" This is an example of how a community can work together to achieve a greater goal. After that month of protests, corrupt politicians were arrested, taxes were lowered, and changes were made in our hospitals and schools. Now our leaders recognize that the people have a voice, and that it is louder than ever before. □

Time to Step Up

Franklin Gear, Grade 9, Westtown School




Over the summer, I had the opportunity to travel to Helsinki, Finland, to become part of a new community. The trip was run by a nonprofit organization called Children's International Summer Villages (CISV), which works toward world peace. I participated in a Step Up camp called Say What!?. Little did I know going into it that this community would forever change my life.

There were nine countries represented at the camp: Japan sent three girls; Finland sent two boys and a girl; Italy, Hungary, China, the United States, Lebanon, Austria, and Poland each sent two boys and two girls. These teenagers were considered the participants of the camp. Each country also sent one adult leader. There were also four staff members from Finland and one from Mexico. Those are all of the members that made up the community.

Say What!? Step Up 2015, along with all other CISV Step Up camps, had a few goals, the main ones being to bring teenagers together to build global friendships, to take a little step toward world peace, and to help us all develop some leadership skills. From the day I got to the camp, I could tell that the next three weeks would be the best of my life. Each day I became closer with every person in the camp. You may be asking, "How did that happen?" One of the main reasons we were able to build such a strong community in three short weeks is that we recognized we were all different from one another. Those differences were not only recognized but cherished. The

time I spent at this camp was the first time I went three weeks without hearing anything negative about somebody's race, religion, beliefs, political views, culture, country, or skin color. We all spoke English—some people didn't know as much as others, but we didn't let that stop us. The language barrier rarely formed even the slightest of problems. At meals nobody rushed to sit next to specific people because we all loved everybody there.

I think the thing that could make every community stronger is cherishing each other's differences like we did. When I was younger, I would always hear about people being accused of crimes due to their race, religion, or cultural heritage. Growing up this way, I never thought I'd see a place where race, culture, and religion existed only through positive perspectives. The absence of intolerance at Say What!? Step Up is one of the things that made it such a strong community. Another thing was simply that we spent time together. Participants spent time with staff, leaders with participants, staff with leaders. It all resulted in a formula that made, in my eyes, the ideal community. I never thought that I would see a perfectly peaceful place in which the only pain was saying goodbye. Will you be able to step up and make your community a better place? 

Thank you to all of the participants of the 3rd Annual Student Voices Project!

Abigail Ezickson, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School

Addie Witter, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School

Aidan Emerson, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School

Alex Dalton, Grade 8, Frankford Friends School

Alex Emig, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School

Alex Guigar, Grade 7, Frankford Friends School

Alex Hemphill, Grade 9, Westtown School

Alex Reichard, Grade 9, Westtown School

Alexander Mock, Grade 11, New Garden Friends School

Amaya Preston, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School

Anabel Barnett, Grade 9, Westtown School

Andrea Sanchez, Grade 9, Westtown School

Andres Lopez Forastier, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School

Andy Chen, Grade 9, Westtown School

Angela Coppola, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School

Anthony Noakes, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School

Aristotelis Bezianis, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School

Arley Johnson, Grade 8, Friends School Mullica Hill

Ashley Ochefu, Grade 9, Westtown School
Audrey Covalski, Grade 9, Westtown School
Aviva Wright, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Baiting Zhu, Grade 9, Westtown School
Bella Zahm, Grade 9, Westtown School
Bilaal Degener, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Bridget Scully, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Bronwyn Johnston, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Bryce Widamen, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Bryn Carnes, Grade 9, Westtown School
Calder Katyal, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Cam Reddish, Grade 10, Westtown School
Carolina De Avila Castilho, Grade 11, Westtown School
Cate Cappuccio, Grade 9, Westtown School
Charles Hart, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Chloe Cohen, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Chloe Moffitt, Grade 9, Westtown School
Chris Crisden, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Christian Cauthen-Lewis, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Christian Nolde, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Claire Camp-Landis, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Conrad Hutchins, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Cruz Buitron, Grade 9, Westtown School
Cyrus Braden, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Daine Grey, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Dani Portnoy, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Daniel Fried, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
David Cole, Grade 9, Westtown School
David Zhang, Grade 9, Westtown School
Dylan Lippiatt-Cook, Grade 9, Westtown School
Dylan Meyer-O'Connor, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Dylan Tyler, Grade 9, Westtown School
Ella Copeland, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Ella Majd, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Emilie Blumenfeld, Grade 9, Westtown School
Emma Diaz, Grade 9, Westtown School

Emma Dower, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Enzo Calabi, Grade 9, Westtown School
Evan Fudala, Grade 9, Westtown School
Evee Bak, Grade 9, Westtown School
Franklin Gear, Grade 9, Westtown School
Gemma Maltby, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Georgie McBride, Grade 8, Frankford Friends School
Gonzalo Morales, Grade 12, Westtown School
Graeme Tsai, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Gus Burns, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Harold Fuson, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Harold Jensen, Grade 9, Westtown School
Heidi Suh, Grade 9, Westtown School
Ingrid Haskell, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Jack DeVuono, Grade 9, Westtown School
Jack Shea, Grade 9, Westtown School
Jackson Shumard, Grade 7, Frankford Friends School
Jacqueline Hutchins, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Jaden Weisman, Grade 9, Westtown School
Jaewon Lee, Grade 10, Westtown School
James Passmore, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Jamie Gibson, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Jason Lisi, Grade 9, Westtown School
Jaxon Hendrickson, Grade 9, Westtown School
Joe Seyedroudbari, Grade 9, Westtown School
Josh Sidener, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Julia Brandt, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Julian Pinckney, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Kate Borkowski, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Katie Ekas, Grade 9, Westtown School
Katie Johnson, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Katie Levy, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Kayo Kuri, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Kiki Rice, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Konstantin Klingler, Grade 10, Westtown School
Kunle Alawode, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School

Lawrence Li, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School	Nyla Scott, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Layla Dawit, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School	Oyinpreye Doubeni, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Layth AlBhaisi, Grade 10, Westtown School	Paola Milbank, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Lejia Zhao, Grade 9, Westtown School	Patrick Durkan, Grade 9, Westtown School
Lili Ladner, Grade 11, Westtown School	Reena Bradley, Grade 9, Westtown School
Liv Scandone, Grade 9, Westtown School	Reilly Blackwell, Grade 12, CompuHigh
Liv Thompson, Grade 9, Westtown School	Rithik Bodepudi, Grade 9, Westtown School
Logan Butler, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School	Robert Kats, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Luca Abu El-Haj, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School	Rubi Rivas, Grade 9, Westtown School
Lucy Silverman, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School	Safia Hamada, Grade 9, Westtown School
Lukas Borja, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School	Sam Cadbury, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Macie McGraw, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School	Sanai Miller, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Madeleine Agudelo, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School	Santhi Chandrasekaran, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Maggie McDevitt, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School	Sara Oswald, Grade 9, Westtown School
Makeda Anthony-Kemp, Grade 9, Westtown School	Sarah Eddy, Grade 9, Westtown School
Manfred Hoffman, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School	Sarah Murad, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Marina Patterson, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School	Simone Arrington, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Mason Brown, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School	Sophia Florence, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Matt Dolente, Grade 9, Westtown School	Sophia Lager, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Matt Federau, Grade 11, Westtown School	Sophie Adler, Grade 9, Westtown School
Max Smith, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School	Sophie Pinnie, Grade 9, Westtown School
Maya Diaz, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School	Tony Chen, Grade 9, Westtown School
Maya Safavi, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School	Tshering Dorji, Grade 9, Westtown School
Maya Torpey, Grade 9, Westtown School	Von Curry, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Michaela Jaeger, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School	Will Herrick, Grade 9, Westtown School
Miles Gunty, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School	William Young, Grade 9, Westtown School
Miller Gentry-Sharp, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School	Xzayvier Brown, Grade 6, Greene Street Friends School
Nancy Dickerson, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School	Yimin Huang, Grade 10, Westtown School
Natalie Cherna, Grade 9, Westtown School	Yuchen Cao, Grade 9, Westtown School
Natalie Neumann, Grade 9, Westtown School	Zachary Marchick, Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
Nick Owens, Grade 5, Friends School Mullica Hill	Zhikang Hu, Grade 10, Westtown School
Nina Wei, Grade 9, Westtown School	

*The 4th Annual Student Voices Project will be announced in September.
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