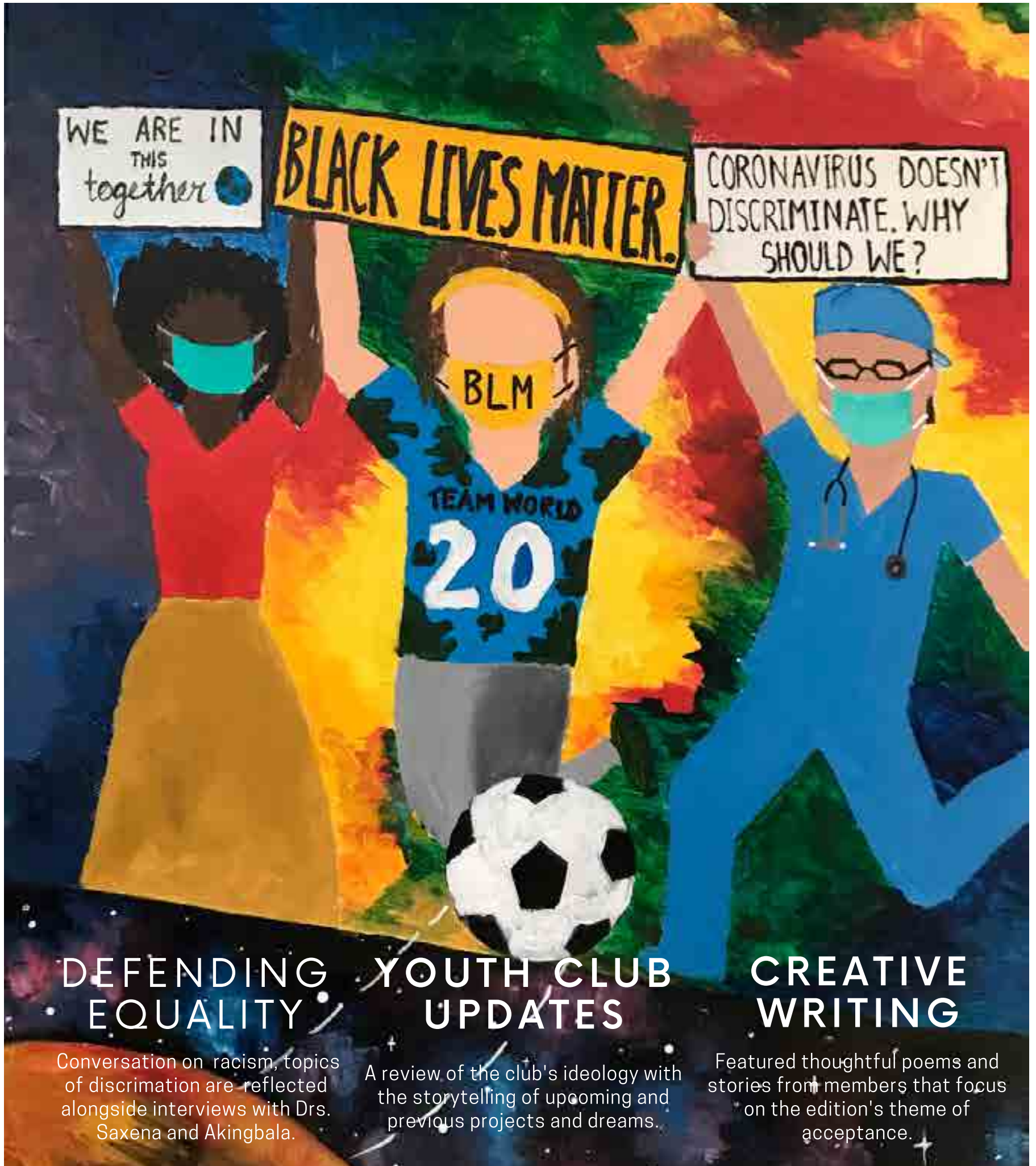


# iWRITER

ISSUE 2 | SEPTEMBER 2020

BY KIDS FOR KIDS MAGAZINE



COVER ART BY ANAGHA NATARAJAN

## DEFENDING EQUALITY

Conversation on racism, topics of discrimination are reflected alongside interviews with Drs. Saxena and Akingbala.

## YOUTH CLUB UPDATES

A review of the club's ideology with the storytelling of upcoming and previous projects and dreams.

## CREATIVE WRITING

Featured thoughtful poems and stories from members that focus on the edition's theme of acceptance.

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# a note from the editor

Dear Readers,

As you may well know, the last few months, weeks, and days have been uncovering tragic and emotional acts; the nation, as well as the world, have awakened to a new view. In June, the Black Lives Matter movement took up a storm on a global stance, and more than ever, the topic that was seldomly spoken on in the past turned into one in wide-spread circulation.



The times are unprecedented, but as the new comes, so does change. With newfound attention and outcry regarding the injustice that has been found to have occurred, our generation will be the ones for society's next shaping- and for us as a whole to move forward, we must focus on acceptance with compassion and benevolence.

Ignorance of events cannot bring further in positive light; this especially brings in forth the topic of how we must accept.

To do so, we must acknowledge, start within oneself, and seek to find the positive light to make such a ripple.

This edition, the iWRITER delves into what this means for us, the youth, for our future, and what's to come- and we couldn't be more honored to bring to you our perspective, hopes, and dreams fueled with creativity and passion.

Yours truly,

*Kate-Yeonjae Jeong*

Editor-in-Chief

*I WRITE to inspire, educate, and  
storytell through the power of words.  
I believe it is a beautiful, moving  
experience to voice the minds of our  
generation into publicity.*

**Edition Mission Statement:** During turbulent times like these, we at the iWRITER want to promote a positive social culture and raise awareness about current events. We hope this edition fulfills our goals and that you enjoy reading.





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Illustration from *All Are Welcome* by Alexandra Penfold & Suzanne Kaufman.



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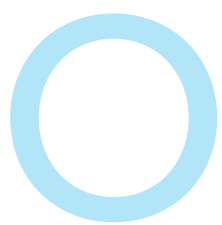
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**DISCLAIMER:** Articles in the iWRITER express the views and opinions of their authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the iWRITE Nonprofit Organization 501(c)3.

# PROMOTING EQUALITY IN A DIVIDED WORLD

*a thought piece on addressing racism as young global citizens*



IN THE COLLECTIVE, humanity has been through several crazy things in 2020, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd. 2020 has been a year of bringing important issues to the forefront of discussion. In the past months, we have seen the surge of the Black Lives Matter Movement, a prouder-than-ever Pride Month, yet at the same time, outright racism. These matters have brought new life to an age-old movement in favor of acceptance and inclusivity. The best thing for all of us, as students, to do is to strive to create a more accepting, equal, and harmonious society. But that is a long, rocky road, with a critical discussion at hand. How do we, as young adults, promote this message of unity in our divided world?

## WHAT IS RACISM?

To have this conversation, let's first define racism. The Anti-Defamation League and ReachOut.au define racism as the

hatred of one person because of their inherent biological characteristics. Racism is more than just being mean; it is judging a person for, most widely nowadays, their skin color or race and making assumptions/having bias based on this uncontrollable factor.

## OPENING A DIFFICULT AND AWKWARD DISCUSSION

Raising and addressing the issue of racism is uncomfortable. Many kids refrain from commenting about this societal issue as they do not wish to confront the 'awkwardness' of racism. According to Dr. Kirti Saxena, and Dr. Felicia Akingbala, starting conversations about diversity by addressing shared values is a better starting point when compared to opening discussions with fear or anxiety. One approach that could make this conversation a little less awkward for us is to research more on the topic and learn about racism. Dr. Saxena and Dr. Akingbala further say that "Exposure to different perspectives and a wide range of multicultural groups can reduce fear and anxiety.



LEFT (PG. 4)

*A slogan promoted by the Canadian government amid racial tensions during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

RIGHT (PG 5)

*A photo of hands linked showing the support of all races and emphasizing that we stand together, for each other.*



Participate in social and community activities, visit museums that promote cross-cultural programs and diversity. Make friends with people of different races, cultures, ages, genders, abilities, and beliefs."

The more educated you are about other cultures, races, and perspectives, the less difficult it might be to start a conversation about racism.

### MICROAGGRESSIONS: THE SMALL THINGS MATTER

Racism in our everyday lives has become more prevalent through minor 'jabs' known as microaggressions. Several examples of these minute yet hurtful expressions are listed below.

- "You speak English so well!"
- "You don't look [insert ethnicity] to me."
- "Oh, I meant where are you really from?"

These can be unintentional or intentional; in fact, it's likely you've either heard, experienced, or said a microaggression at least once in your lifetime. As Dr. Saxena and Dr. Akingbala explain,

"The first steps to deal with microaggressions are understanding them and encouraging awareness to avoid doing them yourself."

### WHAT CAN WE DO?

But how can we, as students, actually and actively stop the propagation of racism? The simple but not so simple answer: it's up to you. A new movement has picked up momentum: anti-racism. Not being racist is not actively doing anything about the issue of racism. An anti-racist, in contrast, is a person who will take action to dismantle racism. Students can promote racial literacy (accurate knowledge about other races and appreciation of other cultures) in the classroom by enacting plays and taking part in different educational and cultural activities.

Bringing up these concepts with family, friends, and the community also encourages a culture of positive social health. Dr. Saxena and Dr. Akingbala suggest thinking ahead and talking things out. "It can be helpful to think ahead of what to do if you are in such a situation. It is important to state that the words and behavior are what you disagree with.

These are difficult situations, and no one is expected to deal with this by themselves. Always ask for support."

These are just a few topics to address when discussing the concept of racism and how we can fight against its propagation as kids. I hope you found this article thought-provoking and I hope that we all can keep this in mind as we re-enter, slowly but surely, social situations in school and outside.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Many thanks to the experts who lent their voices to this article:*



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### BY Eshaan Mani

*I WRITE for the rush of adrenaline I feel when my pen touches the paper. It is that exhilarating experience and the opportunity to not only get my voice out to the public but also be able to be the voice of inspiring people and organizations that inspires me to write.*



# ACCEPTANCE *without* APPROPRIATION

About three years ago, I was watching Disney's animated movie *Zootopia*®, and I recalled a scene where the main characters walk into a "naturalist club" and meet a yak meditating and saying "om," with his matted hair surrounded by flies. Another character was naked and performing yoga. The movie portrayed these "naturalist club" members as dirty and 'other-worldly,' and it appeared to be ridiculing them for not wearing clothes and being free from worldly attachments. I was taken aback that this Disney movie could highlight a character performing yoga while simultaneously ridiculing the characters' external appearance. In fact, the name of the character doing yoga was "Nangi," which means "naked" in Hindi. As a girl of color and someone belonging to the 5,000-plus-year-old religion from which yoga and meditation arose, stereotyping these characters and appropriating Indian culture for laughs bothered me.

Accepting someone for who they are is of the utmost importance, but what happens if one takes an element of someone's background and misrepresents it? That is cultural appropriation, and it represents the inability to understand and respect someone's culture and misuse a person's background for your own intent. Someone may feel entitled to take an aspect of a culture without respecting its origins. Appropriation is ignorant and hurtful, especially when a dominant culture adopts from a minority culture. People are often unaware of their appropriation from other cultures. Circling back to *Zootopia*, the movie proved to be hypocritical. Disney intended the takeaway message of the film as 'don't judge a book by its cover' and that profiling members of society based on physical appearances is unfair. However, the five-minute naturalist club scene goes directly against this message.



Another example of cultural misappropriation is in fashion. People may love to wear Bollywood-style clothes with a decorative dot on the forehead, or enjoy having braided hair, or perhaps sport a Japanese kimono for a special event. Children may beg their parents to buy them a Moana or Aladdin costume for Halloween. Unfortunately, these trends can slip quickly from acceptance and appreciation into misappropriation if there is no respect behind the choice. For example, while wearing the Geisha kimono, if someone wears make-up to create “Asian” eyes, that is a stereotyping. There are also instances of people darkening their skin color when wearing a costume from a minority culture. There is but one thing that can prevent misappropriation, and that is acceptance with a generous serving of respect.

These examples of cultural misappropriation dominate the media and tip the fine balance of acceptance in society towards disrespect. Misappropriation is cause for many controversies, accusations, and destroys relationships. But now that you have a deeper understanding of this topic, you can help the world be more and more courteous towards cultures with meaningful change. This change may include:

1. Don't follow stereotypes: The very root of misappropriation is the false notion that whatever you may hear or see in the media about a group of people is always true.
2. Listen and learn: Talk to your friends about their culture and how they feel it is being represented. Actively seek

out connections with others in an effort to gain a broader perspective.

3. Use your voice as an ally: Call out misappropriation when you witness it! Standing up for the right thing not only empowers you but others as well.

Apologize and be humble: If your actions are thought to cross the line into misappropriation instead of appreciation, don't get defensive. Stay humble and sincere. As long as your mind is open and accepting, we can all have conversations in safe spaces for everyone.

Respect is the remedy for cultural misappropriation, and acceptance is the first step in extinguishing it. Cultural appropriation is complicated, which is all the more reason we need to be talking about it and not let fear get in the way of being honest about it. You are already on the right path to being an accepting, appreciative individual just by starting the process.

**BY** *Sanjna Pandit*

*I WRITE because writing cultivates my ability to be eloquent and express my feelings and ideas. I learn more and more about myself with every new thought that I put on paper. Whether writing an extensive article or fiction poetry, my mind forces me to enter a whole new realm of imagination and discoveries that I never knew I could reach.*



**LEFT**

*A range of floor mats and toilet seat covers depicting Lord Ganesha, another Hindu deity.*

**RIGHT**

*Two Brazilian men wearing traditional native American feather headbands pose for photos at a Carnival street party in Ipanema, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on March 15, 2017 (Image: lazyllama/shutterstock.com).*



# Growing Up Black IN WHITE AMERICA

Two months into my senior year of high school, I will turn seventeen. For the past sixteen years of my life, I have had to learn why people degrade, persecute, and eliminate people similar to my image simply due to their skin tone. Naturally, being schooled on racism since first grade hasn't been the most exciting learning trip, but a necessary one. I didn't identify as someone who associated with the Black Lives Matter movement until my sophomore year. I purposefully dissociated myself from it due to the fact that I knew there was a vast majority of students who were not even aware of BLM's existence; however, I got over that fear quickly after realizing just how grave the issue was, particularly in America. By not uniting with believers of the movement, I would never be treated equally as a black American.

Middle school was awful. I would never realize the full extent of my white-washing until I was fifteen. Fifth to eighth grade primarily consisted of name calling, stereotyping, attempted personality suppression, and more. All these offenses wouldn't come solely from students, but the teachers as well. There were about two-hundred eighty-one students in my middle school, and I am thoroughly confused looking back as to why I didn't let my parents pull me out when they realized I was depressed there. It was never explicit racism, just subtle beliefs that a pre-adolescent black girl would automatically believe from adults and peers who appeared smarter and more distinguished than she was.

I surprised myself when I auditioned for a performing arts high school; the setting was something completely different than what I was accustomed to. On top of that, the school is a notoriously difficult to get into, with one accepted student per ten who apply. Despite the challenges, I was accepted into the school, not realizing how much it would change my life. Suddenly I wasn't the only one with my skin color, my background, and my beliefs. I was thrilled. The excitement started to settle down into my second year, where academics became more serious and I discovered my love for English. Sophomore year English was full of new information regarding the civil rights movement. I started to identify with my true self after watching the Freedom Riders, finally perceiving how speaking out as an African-American in an increasingly white political climate was crucial for extending equality.

I wish I could say everything was perfect, but there's still so much work America needs to do in terms of treating black people differently than they did four-hundred years ago. With more attention being drawn to the BLM movement from firsts in history like Barack Obama to upsetting incidents like George Floyd, more people all around the world are realizing the significance of unequal treatment. It is good to note these changes, but never be completely satisfied with them. As former Freedom Rider and U.S. Congressman John Lewis said, "...you have to be optimistic in order to continue to move forward".

**BY** *Mariah Adeeko*

*I WRITE because I love the organization's message and want to use my talents to promote it and its message.*



Image by @chescaleight

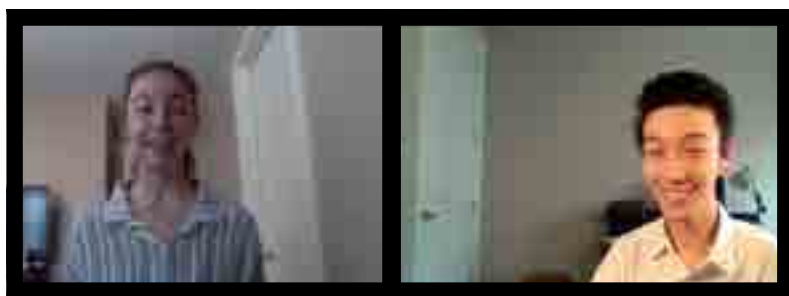


# Not a Trend

As the coronavirus pandemic has swept across America's streets, it's safe to say that many students have found their priorities changed. I, for one, have found that my previously eventful life has been reduced to eating, sleeping, and looking at internet memes (I occasionally use the restroom, too. When I can be bothered). Which is why I find it especially astounding that even during all this, someone in my own community has risen up in order to fight against oppression everywhere.

Claire Elliott, a part-time clarinet section leader, full-time honor student, and a stellar addition to the class of 2022, recently organized a book drive and sale to support the Black Lives Matter movement, making over \$1,000 in profit and counting. We sat down (over the phone) in order to discuss her activism, BLM, and what she thinks the future holds.

Surprisingly enough, Elliott attributed her charity efforts to COVID-19, attesting that the lockdown provided ample time to both educate herself about the cause she was fighting for and plan out such a complex event. However, it's clear that not everyone with free time chose to spend it in such a way- almost every teenager that I know has supported BLM during this lockdown, but not many can claim to have gone to the lengths that Elliott has. She was inspired to set up her book drive after attending a local protest, saying that "it really moved me to see that these issues ran deep. I couldn't just stand by after seeing members of my own community discussing how they were affected by injustice."



Claire E. and Alex Z.

Inevitably, our conversation drifted towards the subject of police brutality, as well as the mistreatment of people of color. Elliott took a solid stance against racially-motivated killing: "The police shouldn't be killing anyone in the first place- choosing to take someone's life when other options are available is a tragedy. Nobody should have that power, and they especially shouldn't apply it to specific races." She believes that a complete retooling of police procedure and their hiring process is necessary, rather than simply continuing to punish those that violate the rules. She said that when looking at how police officers get away with violence, "you have to start at the root of things. You can't just keep cutting off branches and hope that the tree stops growing."

Both Elliott and I are members of the Asian-American community, so we can't personally speak to what has happened, and still is happening, to our African-American peers. However, she believes that everyone, regardless of race, still has to join their fight. "I think it's just a question of compassion," Elliott said. "Just because it isn't happening to you doesn't mean you should ignore it. You have to care. I don't know how else to put it. I can't believe that we've gotten to the point where we can watch other people be murdered and still find a way to not care."

Elliott warned against the dangers of complacency, especially in regards to treating BLM as a trend, or a passing fad. "This is still a very major crisis that's going on. Posting one black square on Instagram isn't doing anything at all, really... This isn't something that ends after a week. This oppression has been going on for centuries, and it won't stop just because you're bored with it." It's a timely reminder, especially now that silence is once again threatening to crush the interest in helping the movement prosper. Elliott has been attempting to continue her activism on both social media and real life, but she says that the possibility of future book drives or other charitable activity is still up in the air, especially with the advent of the new school year. But she still holds out hope that others may continue to rise in her place in order to set the record straight.

"Why are so many people against this movement? It's just a statement: Black Lives Matter. To not support the movement is to deny another person's right to exist."

**BY Alex Zhang**

*I WRITE because it's a way to bring my wildest dreams to life and share them with others. I really love iWRITE because of the family that I've found within the organization.*

# NFL PLAYERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Players like Patrick Mahomes sign high-value, long-term contracts. The first thing that comes to everyone's mind is the question: "What are they going to do with that much money?" The stereotypical answer is that they are going to spend it on cars and useless accessories. However, if you take the time and ask these players what they want to do with their legacy, you can find out a lot about who they are.

Every year at the Pro Bowl, a few kids get the chance to go spend some time playing football with NFL stars. These kids are from the Special Olympics Foundation. Most would say that these kids have a disability, but in their eyes, it is something that makes them unique. They have the same dreams as many other kids but are not as physically gifted. It is easy to judge someone at a glance. But look deeper, these kids have amazing hearts.

At one event in the 2019 Pro Bowl, these kids played on the same field as football stars Patrick Mahomes and Von Miller. Just playing a game of flag football makes their faces light up. "We are so excited to get to come out here and play with some of our idols," one child said.

"I love every opportunity I get to give back to my community. I used to be a kid who wanted to make the NFL once too," Von Miller says when asked about having the chance to play with these children. "The difference is that I had the physical side that they don't. Yet these kids have no disabilities in their minds, and that is my favorite part about them." He goes on to talk about the inspiration he gets from the game

beyond the fame and the money. This is an example of someone who plays to inspire, not to gain clout.

Patrick Mahomes was always high-fiving kids and encouraging these children from the Special Olympics Foundation. "I want to be known as someone greater than just the game. I want to be known as a leader on and off the field." Fast forward one-and-a-half years, and now he is the highest-paid athlete in history. But he wants to put that money right back into his roots and motivation.

The money and clout of being an NFL superstar come with excelling on the field. Doing good doesn't. The media jumps onto every opportunity to spread negativity around a player for any little reason. Players may also spread negativity with their platform. However, it is just as easy to spread good to those people. To make people feel good about themselves and support them. Beyond the field and the camera, this is what players try and do. So even though some athletes have half a billion dollars in the bank account, they can have half a billion times more heart than their money shows.

We should take inspiration from these great athletes, and help others in any way we can.

**BY Vedant Gupta**

*I WRITE for the platform to inspire and show people that they too can do good. Everyone has a chance to tell their story and show their purpose, and writing is one of the ways that I am able to do so.*

LEFT:  
Tarik Cohen celebrating  
giving back to his  
community. Courtesy of  
NFL Twitter.

RIGHT:  
NFL Players Von Miller,  
Tarik Cohen and Patrick  
Mahomes posing with  
fans. Courtesy of NFL  
Twitter.





# 5 WAYS TO BETTER YOUR MENTALITY *with self love*



I'm sure most of us got our external joy outside the house, but those options seem so limited! So, here are five ways how you can better your new stay at home life while showing yourself some self love in the process!

## 1. Skin care!

- a. Oily skin: use a daily facial cleanser twice a day, turmeric soap at night, and moisturize with Aveeno moisturizer with SPF 30. (This has literally saved me.)
- b. Dry skin: drink two liters of water per day, use Cetaphil facial cleanser and the rich version of the Cetaphil moisturizer. STAY AWAY from exfoliants!
- c. Combination: use African black soap twice a day (it's promoted and proved to work for both skin types), along with any moisturizer with SPF 30.

## 2. Exercise for thirty minutes three times a week.

This has been studied to improve your mood and help balance hormonal effects. Going out for a walk in my neighborhood every other day lets me get out of the house and stay focused. It's also a great way to put your mind at ease. If you have any local parks near you, go for those as well.



## 3. Cook your own meals.

I didn't realize how much money I was spending on takeout until quarantine started. It feels so much better to know what's exactly going into your meals when you cook, and to look up copycat recipes to recreate from your favorite restaurants! It's a great way to take advantage of being at home as it passes time and lets you learn a new skill.

## 4. Set a proper sleep schedule.

Eight hours of sleep is ideal. No more staying up until midnight doing God knows what...I'm looking at you, night owls. Go to sleep.

## 5. Meditate!

Benefits of meditation include stress relief, better emotional health and sleep, and even helps improve your memory. Find a quiet place inside or outside and download any meditation app of your choice. Along with walking, it's really helped a lot of people recenter themselves during quarantine. Try it out for a week!

**BY** *Mariah Adeeko*

*I WRITE because I love the organization's message and want to use my talents to promote it and its message.*

# Keeping Up With THE YOUTH CLUB

**T**he news today can be disheartening. When there is so much negativity in the world, it can be difficult to imagine a different tomorrow. But through building a community that both unites us and encourages our differences, we can create a brighter future. The iWrite Youth Club embodies this idea.

The Youth Club is relatively new, but on its short journey, there is a pattern of openness and opportunity. It's a space for self-expression and creativity, providing an accepting atmosphere in which students of varied ages, schools, and interests can come together and grow, both as literary lovers and as leaders. The club's purpose is to encourage a love of reading and writing, offering opportunities to be published and share the excitement of literature. But its value and impact extend so much further. It provides a system of support for members to create their own projects and to give back to the club and community as well.

The Youth Club provides many avenues of engagement, such as its interactive and informative website (<https://iwriteyouthclub.com/>) created by one of our members, Eshaan Mani. Sofia Bajwa, another member who graduated in the past year, extended the club's impact with her own project: creating a reading nook for a Title 1 school. With

the help of other Youth Club members, she revamped a corner of the school's library into an inviting spot to read.

This past year, the Youth Club continued to give back to the community through the Lights Out Lit project, which makes bedtime stories more accessible by offering them in video form to the community. Youth Club members appear on the screen, reading their favorite stories. The scanned pages of their books are behind them, enabling students to read along with the members. The project was designed to foster a love of literature by letting students read and be read to simultaneously.

Furthering its goal of collaboration, the Youth Club has recently begun a new project: the iWriter magazine. Founded in the spirit of community, this magazine provides a place for many students' voices to be heard. It is also a sign of the club's future, highlighting its potential for even more expansion and development in the coming year.

Although we are all beginning the school year with uncertainty, the iWrite Youth Club is certain that through an open mind and enthusiasm to serve, the future is bright in the Houston community.



*LEFT:*  
iWRITE Youth Club  
members at the  
iWRITE Creative  
Writing Camp.

*Right:*  
iWRITE Youth Club  
Members at Literacy  
Night.

**BY** *Katie Givon*

*I WRITE because I believe that words can transform lives, share ideas, and let people know that they're not alone. I love that iWRITE gives kids a voice and encourages them to express themselves.*



# The PERFORMANCE

If you didn't know Biana, you would have thought she was a normal girl. She had a dark complexion accompanied with light brown hair and blue eyes. Unless you talked about her school life, you wouldn't see anything peculiar about her. Biana was 12 years old, though exceptionally smart. Most children her age were in their first semester of sixth grade, just beginning to grasp the subject of pre-algebra. Biana, however, had been bumped up three grades due to her brilliance. If Biana were to bring the subject up, most would congratulate her and flood her with praise. Secretly, Biana disliked the change, though she wouldn't tell anyone why.

As she was getting ready for school, Biana couldn't help but think of how much she longed to be in 6th grade with her friends. Ever since the first day of school, she knew to wear dark and dull colours, as if she didn't want any attention attracted to herself, which she didn't. She slipped on her grey hoodie, along with her backpack, which wasn't too far from an elephant's color.

When Biana arrived at school, she took her normal route from the back trying her absolute best not to get noticed. As usual, she failed. Biana tried to keep walking as a squad of 9th graders started marching in Biana's way to try to cut her off. Brittany and her posse, each with a smug grin on their face glared at Biana as she squirmed under their watch. Brittany laughed, a cold, evil, sound. This was the main reason she didn't want to be in ninth grade. Biana pulled her hood over her head, wishing she could dissolve into it.

"Look at little Ms. Smartypants" Brittany said in her nasal voice. Brittany's posse all started laughing along with Brittany. After making sure they had attracted all the attention to Biana they strode off laughing. Biana sighed, waiting until they rounded to the front of the school, before pulling the door open, and venturing inside. Brittany had made it clear that she disliked Biana from day one of 9th grade. For some reason, Brittany found it worthwhile bullying Biana on her appearance and particular schooling.

Biana shuffled through the halls of the high school trying her best to blend in with her surroundings. After a minute of walking, when she reached her locker, she saw a peculiar looking flyer posted next to it.

Theatre Auditions Today! Sign up if you would like to act in our musical!

It was red in color and had a box below the words "Sign up". Reluctantly, Biana fished out a pen, signed the paper, and slipped it inside the box. Oddly, her passion had always been to sing and act. Though she was excited, Biana spent the rest of the day worrying about how badly kids would tease her if she were to embarrass herself.

Soon the time rolled around to audition. Biana made her way to the theatre room, slipping in just as the last school bell rang. She sat in an empty row, hanging her head down making sure nobody would be able to recognize her. All you had to do to audition was sing a small portion of a song and act out a snippet of dialogue. Though this would usually be easy for her a large part of her felt nervous.

As she looked around the room, she saw an almost full house of kids, with a few rows empty. She scanned the crowd of faces, and found her eyes resting on a blonde girl with brown eyes. Brittany. If it was even possible, Biana felt as though her nervousness had doubled, and was now resting on her shoulders like a 100 pound weight. Biana tried to take slow and steady breaths, which barely helped.

After what seemed like hours, Biana heard her name called. She made her way to the stage. She could almost feel Brittany's eyes set on her, threatening to cut her into pieces. A judge, with long black hair handed her a script to read off of. Biana proceeded to read off of the small piece of paper. The judges all seemed to be giving her a grin, as she began to set up to sing. So far so good. The microphone seemed to shake in her hands as she looked back at the audience. She saw Brittany, snickering in the backseat. Biana started to hum a tune from her favorite song. As she glanced back at the judge's awe-struck faces she felt her voice growing louder and more confident. When she reached the final verse of the song she looked back at the judges who had grins which seemed to reach their eyes. As she glanced back at Brittany, she seemed to have tears in her eyes, though a smile on her face. Biana smiled back, and as she left the theatre she didn't mind having all the eyes on her. Maybe ninth grade wouldn't be so bad after all.



**BY Prisha Shivani**

*I WRITE because it is a creative way of expressing your thoughts and ideas through words. iWRITE has given me the opportunity to write and publish, sharing my pieces with many people.*

# A PLACE FOR *poetry*

## *Featured Poems from the iWRITER Staff*

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### NOT TO CARE

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BY *Annie Jones*

**I WRITE** because it is a way for me to share my thoughts and opinions with others, showing them different perspectives and stories while doing something I enjoy. I love to read and (of course!) write, attempt to play the saxophone and stuff myself with Tex-Mex. iWRITE has helped me to drastically improve my writing and encouraged me to help others in my community.

This isn't too bad, but  
This one isn't terrible, but  
I don't really take it personally, but  
It's not directed at me,  
It was funny,  
I'm a boy,  
I don't know if this qualifies,  
We shouldn't take it seriously, but  
It still kinda stung

It still kind of made me  
uncomfortable  
angry, alone  
annoyed, worried, sad,  
scared  
Boys have repeatedly called me a man,  
I've been called skanky/slutty,  
I've heard things like: That's not ladylike,  
Boys shouldn't cry, girls are good at cleaning,  
I was expecting more from a girl,

Buck up, man up  
I've been told: You throw like a girl,  
Don't do push-ups like a girl—do real ones,  
That's gay, boys can't be bi,  
Go back to the kitchen,  
make me a sandwich

Usually I just ignore it,  
I try to just take it as a joke,  
I ignore them,  
I try not to yell or snark back,  
we're taught to shake it off  
We're taught not to care



## THE REAL WORLD

BY *Nia Shetty*

**I WRITE** because of the joy I feel, when I put a new idea down on paper. To be able to bring feelings and emotions to the reader, through ideas that I get to express.

This was an unknown world to me  
Covered up by fantasies  
The real world came crashing down  
Uncovering many snags

In my little bubble, there were not a lot of muddles  
When I stepped out, the tables turned  
Problems came flooding

People being called out and brutally hurt  
because of their skin color  
Acceptance was nowhere in sight

Differences in people, should not affect how others view them  
Looks do not defy a person  
So, treat them with the same respect and kindness  
That you would want to be treated with

The wish all of us should have  
With fantasies or not  
Is that with acceptance in place,  
The world can become a better place

## YOU'RE NOT PERFECT

BY *Sophie Yu*

**I WRITE** to let my thoughts, feelings, and ideas spread across the paper. To form and create a story that can be told in any perspective, described with any words. Writing can create a whole new world.

You're not perfect  
Your unkempt hair  
Tangled and frizzy  
Like a bird's nest  
Brown sugar and caramel  
Mixed into one color  
You're not perfect  
Eyes a transparent blue  
Like a marble  
Held up to shimmering light  
You're not perfect

A loose T shirt  
And skinny ripped jeans  
Nikes hitting the ground  
Sprinting in the rain  
You're not perfect  
But if you wouldn't mind  
I would like to sit  
In the lunchroom  
At table four  
In the third row  
Right next to you.

## THE SAME AND DIFFERENT

BY *Austin Lopez*

**I WRITE** because I have words to say and a passion to say them with. I love the old Star Wars, Percy Jackson, and AJR. I'm also a firm believer that everything isn't always as it seems.

Everyone is the same, everyone is different  
It cannot be described by words flowing out like a torrent  
Some are weak, some are strong, some are quiet, some are loud  
We all lie, we all love, we all hate, we all find a shroud  
Some will wallow, some will soar, some will be satisfied, some will dream  
We all win, we all lose, we all laugh, we all scream  
Some can build, some can destroy, some can remain, some can elope  
We all endure, we all break, we all despair, we all hope  
So, how can you say we are either one  
I don't mean to shun, but I am not done  
Our similarities don't make us the same and our differences don't make us apart  
Don't protest or squirm, for we complement and combine, instead take heart

# BOOK *Talk*

## *SLAY: A Game of Division or Unison*



**S**LAY IS A 318-PAGE FICTIONAL BOOK BY BRITTNEY MORRIS. In her book Brittney details about how a teenager named Keira. Kiera lives in Bellevue, Washington, balances her relationship, school work, and her virtual life. Kiera created a virtual card game called Slay. In the game each player selects six cards, at random, which they organize to provide the maximum amount of protection and damage. Slay was meant to be a safe space for African-Americans. However, things take a turn for the worst when Keira's game Slay is unfairly labeled as 'racist and exclusionary'. Now, Kiera has to do damage control, before her family out. A boy in Kansas City was murdered as a direct result of the game Slay. In addition to having to cope with the fact that someone lost their life because of her game Keira gets threatened with a lawsuit. Keira only set out to create a place where African-Americans felt welcomed, accepted, and had a sense of belonging. Yet, an alleged white supremacist somehow manages to infiltrate her game, and Kiera has to single-handedly defend an entire virtual world. If she doesn't Slay like she's never slayed before she may lose her safe space, her best friend, and the world she created. She has to worry about making sure her game doesn't get taken off the internet, and that she doesn't get sued. In addition, to that, her parents and sister can't find out that she created the game. It certainly doesn't help that the game is plastered all over the World Wide Web, news, and Twitter.

I'm a minority who has experienced some of the situations Kiera has gone through, such as being subject to awkward situations because of the texture of my hair. It's very easy to relate to Keira when she's feeling like she just needs a place free of uneasy situations and uncomfortable conversations which makes the storyline is very realistic. The cards in the book are very entertaining and relevant to encounters you may experience during a family gathering. My personal favorite is the twist-out card in which the player's hair entangles the other player, making it easier for you to score more points. While Slay mainly focuses on the game, it also includes some interesting characters. One of the most impressive parts of Slay is how relatable and credible the characters are. The main characters in Slay consist of Kiera, the main

character, her aggressive boyfriend Malcolm, her online best friend Cicada, and her friend's brother Wyatt. This book would be excellent for anyone who is for unity, equality, and empowerment.

Slay describes the difference between pro-black and anti-white, two easily confused terms. Also, Brittany tries to convey how important it is that everyone know the difference between these terms: one is amazing, whereas the other is extremely dangerous.



Photo of Brittney Morris

**BY** *Lexi Bumah*

*I WRITE because writing for me is a mental massage and an authentic way to express myself. In-person I'm shy. When I have the opportunity to write, I find it exhilarating. I love having the ability to convey my feelings, without feeling uncomfortable. That's why iWRITE.*

# RECOMMENDATIONS

*From The iWRITER Staff*

## *The Hate U Give*

**By Angie Thomas**

Thomas explores important and relevant themes from the perspective of a high school girl, Starr. The reader feels Starr's devastation, confusion, and fear throughout her journey because of the raw, relatable narration. Starr's story is becoming increasingly relevant, and it's one that every teen should read.



## *Santiago's Road Home*

**By Alexandra Diaz**

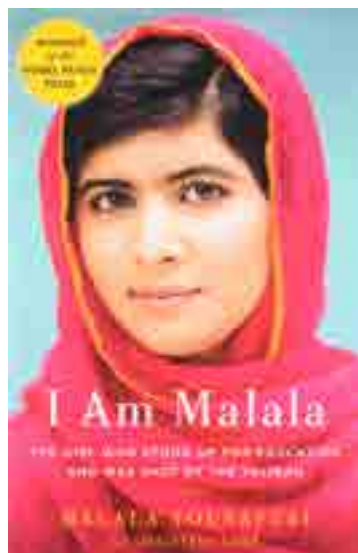
Diaz paints a clear picture of the gruesome journey U.S. immigrants must take—and the additional struggles they face once reaching their destination. Diaz carries a voice not often heard in the ongoing debates about immigration and human rights.



## *Swing*

**By Kwame Alexander**

This book poignantly expresses emotion through art and poetry, touching on difficult topics like PTSD and racial prejudice in America. Alexander illustrates what the U.S. flag should represent—equality and freedom for everyone.



## *I Am Malala*

**By Malala Yousafzai**

This book is a beautifully written and incredibly inspiring biography, detailing the life of Nobel-prize winner Malala Yousafzai, who fought for the right to education in her homeland of Pakistan. Filled with intricate details of her childhood home, the Swat Valley, heart-wrenching displays of the Taliban's cruelty, and thought-provoking commentary on the world we live in, this book is a must-read for all ages.

## *The Color Purple*

**By Alice Walker**

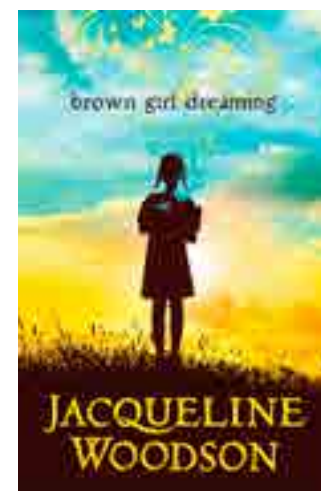
This book is the highly acclaimed tale of a young girl's life in segregated Georgia, under the control of an abusive father and husband. Though her life is full of unimaginable hardship, the main character Celie is able to find hope and joy and to inspire it in the reader.



## *Brown Girl Dreaming*

**By Jacqueline Woodson**

It's a beautiful book for youth that shares a story from a person of color's perspective while growing up. It is an amazing tale that tells the story of a girl's struggles, lifestyle, and joy through a segregated state. This book is also critically acclaimed and has been adapted to musicals and notable book clubs.





# MEET THE IWWRITER STAFF



**Katie Giveon**

*Building Community*



**Kate Jeong**

*Letter from the Editor*



**Nia Shetty**

*The Real World*



**Prisha Shivani**

*The Performance*



**Lexi Bumah**

*Slay: A Game of  
Union or Division*



**Austin Lopez**

*The Same and Different*



**Eshaan Mani**

*Defending Equality  
in a Divided World*



**Annie Jones**

*Book Talk:  
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**Vedant Gupta**

*NFL Players Making a  
Difference*



**Mariah Adeeko**

*Growing Up Black in White  
America & Self-Love Advice*



**Sanjna Pandit**

*Acceptance Without  
Appropriation*



**Alex Zhang**

*Not a Trend*



**Halliday Mafrige**

*Layout Designs*



**Sophie Yu**

*You're Not Perfect*

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