

cuisine to go unnoticed and unaddressed. Word Count = 982

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**Division II - 2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

**Paola Campos Central Valley HS Megan Oliveria, teacher**  
**"The Great Impact of a Simple Walk"**

As I write, I sit in my backyard, where the sun shines through a big oak tree that provides a beautiful shade. It is October, and even though

other parts of the country are getting ready for winter, California is only just realizing that summer is over. It's no wonder why people call it the 'Golden State.' The beautiful thing about California, though, isn't the weather or the agriculture or even the vast range of life that seems to surround us everywhere we look. It's the people. California is united even though it is full of diverse individuals, cultures, and heritages; all seemingly working to help one another. California is the land of opportunities, prosperity, and the overall will to succeed. Thus, this beautiful state that we have the privilege to call home is constantly leading our country towards progress and change. Generation after generation of immigrants and natives have learned to live among each other and each has been given the same wide range of opportunities to succeed in every field, career, or path imaginable. As an immigrant who's been offered these opportunities, I can assure you that this is truly a wonderful sight to see.

However, California is also the leading state in pollution within the United States. The problem: lack of education regarding the impacts of the daily choices Californians make everyday. As the years have progressed, highways and roads have become highly congested and the once perfect solution for accessible transportation has now become a burden to many Californians. In California alone, there are about thirty-five million people, of which thirty million have registered vehicles that "emit thousands of tons of pollutants everyday" (*Air Pollution a Problem in California?*). These pollutants are harmful not only to the environment, but also to the people that breathe them in everyday. Yet, even though these pollutants may be the cause of thousands of headaches, asthma attacks, and respiratory problems, residents of California have come to see such harmful air quality as something that is completely normal (*How Does Pollution Affect Humans*).

As defined by the *National Geographic Society*, "Pollution is the introduction of harmful materials into the environment." Though broad in its implications, there is one main cause of pollution in California: motor vehicles. In an attempt to see the effects of cars on the environment, I embarked on a challenge to walk to school everyday for the last three months. My route to school included passing a bridge that directly overlooked the freeway, and everyday the sight before me got worse; smoke could be seen everywhere, lines of traffic extended beyond what my eye could see, etc. Beyond anything that I saw, the worst part was

that within each car that passed below, cars that were designed to fit between five and eight people each, only contained one or two people. It was astonishing to me that people went about their lives without any regard for the impacts that their choices had on the environment.

After researching and scouring the internet for an answer, I reached one conclusion: there are many solutions; each works for different environments, situations, and people. For instance, in many European nations, public transportation is one main contributor to low pollution levels because thousands of individuals use the metro, the bus, or even carpool to work to avoid the hassle of traffic. Other European nations promote the use of bikes and walking to work in an attempt to reduce traffic congestion. (*Clean Transport, Urban Transport*). On the other side of the continent (and just south of us), we have Mexico, who up until 2018 was the most polluted country in the world, but recently undertook new methods to reduce pollution. Now, every vehicle has been labeled with a sticker, and these stickers indicate which cars can be driven on a day to day basis; those with pink stickers can't drive on Wednesdays and so forth (*On the Road in Mexico*). Considering that California is the center of technology and agriculture, implementing some of these techniques could be highly beneficial to all Americans. One solution includes having students (who live within certain boundaries) walk to school or carpool. By doing this, the state would reduce the amount of transportation used everyday and help the ever increasing levels of obesity in the nation, plus it would also teach responsibility. Accordingly, establishing better public transportation will decrease the amount of traffic on the freeway and indirectly reduce the amount of noise pollution plaguing cities and people. However, the biggest benefit would be for Californians to know that with their actions, they are supporting a sustainable lifestyle for their children and generations to come.

It is time for sustainable development and for the world to start focusing on methods that could improve the lifestyle of the seven billion people currently inhabiting it. Sustainable development is essential in providing peace worldwide because we first need to be at peace with the environment before focusing on social/political progress. California needs to be the beginning of a movement that will ensure that our lifestyle never ruins the beautiful geography the world has been graced with. Hence, all of the methods and resources available should be analyzed in order to find one, or many, alternative methods that could help our environment.

this can only come with awareness and affordability. Although not as convenient or cheap as fast food, California cuisine is accessible. Tons of food is exported from California daily, in addition to supplying local stores and restaurants. Furthermore, there is a growing number of backyard gardens and it is estimated that "by 2003, the school garden movement had grown to 3,000 of the 9,100 schools." (Chen 177) The growing number of private gardens is a wonderful inexpensive alternative. Another solution to cost is Imperfect Produce. Imperfect Produce is an organization that collects disfigured, yet nutritiously equal, produce unwanted by commercial sellers and sells them door to door for thirty percent less than the perfect-looking produce in grocery stores. (Imperfect Produce) Through these alternatives, Californians have a way to access cheaper produce.

Education in California's agriculture must also be provided to ensure that Californians are aware of the rarity of their state. We should be inspiring people to go to their local farmers' markets, plant their own gardens, buy local food, and should discourage the abuses of fast food. London, England's capitol, plans to take a step that should be considered by California: in May 2018, Mayor Sadiq Khan confirmed that he was planning to ban all junk food advertisements on any public transportation in London to help lower child obesity rates. (Elliott) A step like this might lower the junk food craze and lead to healthier dining options. By inventing more ways to address this problem and taking advantage of the programs already existing, California can take steps towards a healthier lifestyle.

Finding solutions to this problem will not only assist California's population, making it healthier and stronger, but will also provide Californians with a sense of pride; being proud of California's impact in agriculture and cuisine not only around the world, but locally. Making fresh produce affordable will also help California's agricultural economy by supplying the system with more customers, making for better sales and more revenue while creating a positive difference in the community. This will improve the lives of Californians, eventually leading to a more peaceful and secure state where farmers are supported by their fellow citizens and the bond between the land and the people strengthens as allegiance and admiration towards the state grows through the food. Given the opportunity to fortify our lives and homeland, as Californians, we cannot allow this misfortune about California

freshly picked produce, not only from farmers' markets, but even grocery stores. Our state's cuisine has risen in popularity around the world. A delicious and healthy choice, this simple farm-to-table food is described by *The Eater* in five words: "Fresh, seasonable, local, sustainable, and original." (Addison) However, this worldwide knowledge of California's produce and cuisine goes unrecognized by many Californians, who could strengthen their bodies while supporting their state's agricultural economy by choosing locally fresh grown foods.

The main reasons Californians do not dine on their cuisine stem from ignorance regarding price, health benefits, and California cuisine. All one has to do is walk into a grocery store and glance at the foods sold at eye level on the shelves to realize that the majority of Californians do not dine like my family. Not only do they chose unhealthy options, but they have no awareness of it. Around the world, people know, love, and eat California cuisine. Yet in the bread basket of the world, where the climate allows for anything to grow, and provides over a third of the country's vegetables and two-thirds of the country's fruits and nuts, ("California Agricultural Production Statistics") people are not knowledgeable about this and eat unhealthily. Some may argue that this is because acquiring fresh food is expensive, but living in California, one does not necessarily have to visit farmers' markets to get fresh food. California provides so much food that even the produce in the grocery stores is fresh. (Karrie) The people in California need to recognize this.

California cuisine is one of the healthiest cuisines in the world. According to a study done by CNN, California cuisine was rated number two when showing the ten healthiest ethnic cuisines, only second to Greek. (Corapi) However, even today, studies show that the average American eats fast food three times a week. (Lenhoff) Fast Food is popular because it is cheap, quick, and found on almost every street corner in cities across the state. Not simply consumed for an occasional easy meal, its addictive convenience transforms it into a routine that becomes regular in the lives of Californians. It is no secret that the food produced by these restaurants is unhealthy and low quality, yet still the numbers of fast food customers far outnumber those in the California cuisine movement. Junk food in itself can lead to nutritional deficiencies, weight gain, cardiovascular problems, and insulin resistance. (Langton) This is a problem that needs to be addressed by taking the right actions leading towards a brighter future.

Californians must be educated to make healthier decisions, but

Even though many will doubt this movement, with a determined mindset, educated individuals, and realistic strategies, everyone can help this idea become a reality. After all, with so many benefits for the people, the environment, and the world, what's to lose? In the words of author Suzy Kassem, "To really change the world, we have to help people change the way they see things. Don't only strive to be the change you want to see in the world, but also help all those around you see the world through commonalities of the heart so that they would want to change with you. The language of the heart is mankind's main common language." Word Count: 997

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### **Division II - 3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

**Reza Banankhah Independent Study Susan Janis, teacher  
"Gouged Sands"**

California is a paradise. In technology, agriculture and environment, it rises above other states. The most important part of California, in my opinion, is the beautiful environment. Californians take for granted the works of art that nature provides our state, which bring in billions of dollars in tourism revenue. Nature provides us with not only a beautiful and diverse environment, but a motivation for citizens to focus on the land they inhabit. This makes me glad to live in California. However, we take advantage of our land as we leave marks and damage our beautiful environment. This is a pressing matter, as every day our coastlines are

slowly being destroyed by our actions.

Our coastline is one of the most important areas of our environment, housing innumerable species of marine life and waterfowl. However we take it for granted, and it shows in our actions. The San Francisco Bay is a great example of how we are damaging our environment. The San Francisco Bay is a shallow estuary that drains water from 40% of California (About the Estuary). However, according to the EPA, over 90% of Bay area wetlands have been lost in the past century (What are the Challenges?). Millions of people live in the Bay Area, and due to urban expansion, these wetlands have been filled in, with the ones remaining being threatened. Part of this issue comes from dredging, as millions of cubic feet of sand and mud are dredged up from the Bay each year. While this may be necessary to allow ships to enter the Bay, it directly erodes the shores (Sejal Choksi-Chugh).

These issues are not in any way being helped by President Donald Trump (Thrush). His new budget plan will not only cut, but eliminate, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency funding for the Bay. This plan will reduce government funding for the program by 31% (Gibbens). This is an issue of considerable magnitude, as there are currently about ten billion dollars in government funding for California's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Agencies. These budget cuts would have a widespread impact on the estuary and the surrounding environment. For example, this would cut the funding from EPA programs such as the Marine Pollution Control Program, which manages where material dredged up from the Bay ends up. Around one billion dollars of funding for Bay Area programs would be cut, leading to 3200 of their employees being laid off. Our coastline is one of the most biologically productive coastlines in the world, and these proposed budget cuts pose a great threat to our coast.

We also need to maintain funding for our shorelines due to the detrimental environmental impact many companies have on our environment. For example, the Poseidon Seawater Desalination Plant in Huntington Beach was the largest seawater desalination plant in the Western Hemisphere when it was built. The originally approved plans

enforcement officers and the rest of the world. So, what are you waiting for? Word Count 917

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### Division II - 1st Place

**Emily Swehla Independent Study Susan Janis, teacher  
"California's Bounty"**

"We eat every day, and if we do it in a way that doesn't recognize value, it's contributing to the destruction of our culture and of agriculture. But if it's done with a focus and care, it can be a wonderful thing. It changes the quality of your life." (Alice Waters) Sitting in my room in the late afternoon, I smell a mouthwatering whiff of dinner cooking in the oven from the kitchen, and it is not long before I am called to the table for the meal my mom has prepared. The tomatoes harvested from our garden only minutes before, and the melted cheese on top, signify the beginning of summer. By the end of the long warm months, I will have had many meals, mostly consisting of locally grown fresh foods.

California cuisine is what makes California special to me. In few places around the world can one acquire a vast assortment of

and fear but it is also interfering with important work that needs to be done to keep communities safe, such as solving investigations, writing reports, and stopping crimes. This type of work is important to the community, state, and the world and in a way it is being hindered and looked down upon. This is not peaceful or just. It is a huge mess for the state of California and the country.

However, hope is not lost forever. California and the U.S. are not trapped in this vicious cycle of fear forever. There are ways to mend and repair the bond that hatred and fear have torn apart. Mandisa, singer and previous *American Idol* contestant wrote in one of her songs, "We all bleed the same. We're more beautiful when we come together. We all bleed the same. So tell me why, tell me why. We're divided. If we're gonna fight. Let's fight for each other. If we're gonna shout. Let love be the cry." Her words show what needs to be the goal of California, and all America, coming together to fight division. It could be as simple as saying thank you to a law enforcement officer. Perhaps, it is raising awareness about the problem that is lurking in the midst of communities. For the law enforcer it could look like spending time with the elderly, children, and others in the community to show they care and that they are human too or showing the same tolerance that they long for to others. No matter how people come together, it will make a difference in the lives of law enforcement, their families, the community, and the people of California and the rest of the world as a whole. If the people of California can learn to have tolerance and not jump to conclusions because of position, race, or career, this state would be much better off and a place where fear is not something in daily life. Then law enforcement would be able to do their job to their best ability and not have to live in fear and the people of the community would have a better relationship with those around them and new gained confidence in the law enforcement.

Working to improve California, whether it be through caring about the good of law enforcement, spending time with senior citizens, or feeding the hungry, is an important step to making the world a better place. Small acts of kindness and appreciation can make California a beautiful place and a place where people want to be. California can transform into a place where people can live full of courage. California can be renewed into a place where children grow up with wide eyed admiration for law enforcement. California can refine into a place where the rest of the world looks at and thinks, "I want to be like them." California can become a place where living in peace is not just a distant hope but a

sought to minimize their effect on marine life through advanced technologies, which would replace the outdated water intake pipes due to their harmful effect on the surrounding fish. It also planned to minimize the effect of the discharge of brine, which deteriorates the shoreline and is toxic to the marine life. However, they were found to have lied in their claim that the desalinated water would reduce the amount of water imported from the State Water Project (Gonzalez). This comes in addition to their use of the outdated open ocean intakes that were already denied use of by an existing power plant, due to its devastating effect on the marine environment.

Companies such as Poseidon have a great effect on the environment. The brine that Poseidon's desalination plant produced was dumped into the ocean, having a catastrophic effect because not only does brine have a very high concentration of salt, but it also erodes the coastlines (Al-Barwani). Poseidon turned a blind eye to the erosion and did not attempt to resolve the problem. Funding for our EPA programs is key to the prevention and reversing of the damage that such companies cause.

Our deteriorating coastlines pose a threat to the peace of our state. The erosion of our coastlines that has been accelerated by the actions we make put us at a higher risk of disasters. Our state's coast protects the land from flooding caused by tsunamis and flash floods (Natural Infrastructure). The risk of such disasters is further increased when accounting for global warming. With a rising flood level and deteriorating coastlines, how will we protect our tranquil lands?

The ways to prevent the destruction of our coastlines and marine life are numerous, but it is up to the people in our great state to take action. The simplest way to help is to stop Donald Trump's plan to cut EPA funding for our coastlines. This will allow us to avoid the restrictions that come from a nonexistent budget. Alternatively, we could also fund restoration projects using monetary penalties for polluting companies, instead of tax money. It is also important that we advocate for stricter laws on reviewing industrial water pollution. This would prevent disasters such

as the one seen with the company Poseidon from happening. Increasing protections to lessen our impact on the environment are an obvious step in the right direction, but it is up to the inhabitants of these lands to step up and advocate for what is right.

The current state of our coastline is a threat to the peace we experience in California. Imagining the absolutely devastating effects that a flood would have on San Francisco, it is easy to see how our weakened coastlines will pose a threat to the area, not to mention the damage to structures and homes. It is our moral duty to prevent such a scene from occurring. As global warming occurs, the risks of floods and rising water levels increase as well. It is only through passionate voices that we will be able to prevent the destruction our coastlines face in the future and ensure peace in our coastal cities. Word Count: 1000

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#### Division I - 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

Molly Howard Whitmore Charter HS Kelly Hayes, teacher  
"The Community, Law Enforcement, and Peace"

The vibrant blue ocean waves crash across speckled golden California sand. The tall trees reach up their vivid green branches full of crisp leaves towards the bright blue sky. The rich farm country reaches farther than the eye can see. Tall skyscrapers and exciting cities sing with the sounds of people going somewhere. The huge mountains wear a fluffy coat of snow on their triangular peaks. The deer and quail scurry across the curvy road on peaceful drives. The golden orange poppies glow like little sparks of fire scattered across a field or in a crack in the pavement. Those things fill me with happiness to live in California. With diverse nature, sights, and people there is always adventure to be found. However, the stunning land called California is not always tranquil.

California is full of division and disunity, especially between law enforcement and the community. The people do not trust, or in some extreme cases hate, the law enforcement causing tension and division between the two. This causes both parties, the community and law enforcement, to feel threatened and deeply stressed. A survey summed up by *The Washington Post* talks about how law enforcement officers feel about this distrust in the community. The article says, "More than 7 in 10 say officers have become more timid about stopping to question suspicious people, roughly three-quarters say fellow officers report they are more reluctant to use force when necessary, and more than 9 in 10 say fellow officers have grown more worried about their safety" (Clement). This survey portrays how with all the fear in the minds of the public and law enforcement, the work the officers are able to do is being negatively affected. A different survey from 2015 said the following, "Democrats' confidence in police dropped 13 percentage points over the last two years compared with 2012-2013, a larger change than for any other subgroup" (Jones). These results are some of the many that show an enormous decrease in confidence in peace officers, especially in the Democratic party, which makes up a majority of California and the community here. The loss of trust and gain of fear have snowballed into a divided country. A *Hendon Media Group* article states, "Without solid relationships and the cooperation of the community, law enforcement cannot be effective" (Haug). Thus, not only does the tension that has emerged cause stress

interpreter mediated visits received the highest levels of satisfaction from Spanish speakers, suggesting that trained interpreters speaking Spanish be available at all times to effectively communicate the physician's message and assist patients throughout the visit.

More importantly, Flores indicated that a lack of interpreters makes health care providers "tend to rely on bilingual family members, friends, or even hospital staffers who aren't trained medical interpreters," resulting in "more than three quarters, or 77%" of nonprofessional interpreter caused medical errors.<sup>3</sup>

I realize some might feel that undocumented workers shouldn't be given such consideration because, for example, they don't pay taxes. Yet immigrants, both documented and undocumented, do indeed file tax returns just like ordinary U.S. citizens. The Institute of Taxation and Economic Policy indicates about half of undocumented workers in the United States file income tax returns. The most recent IRS data shows it received 4.4 million income tax returns from workers without Social Security numbers, including a large number of undocumented immigrants, who paid \$23.6 billion in income taxes in 2015 alone. It's important to note they don't have access to federal medical care benefits, despite paying these taxes.

Equal access to medical care, whether we are documented residents of California or not, benefits us as a whole. For example, it ensures we have herd immunity in terms of vaccinations. It also ensures workers, undocumented or not, are more satisfied with their jobs and their lives, improving worker morale and interaction. We can't always be in control of where we come from—but we can demonstrate compassion to those in our community who need our help. Robert Ingersoll says, "We rise by lifting others." I can't think of a better way to create a more just and peaceful world in my town, my state and country. In light of the ever-growing diversity of the California, one of my goals is to research and identify potential areas of improvement for the surgeon, interpreter and patient perspectives. Word Count 790

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#### Division III - 1<sup>st</sup> Place

**Stella Whitley   Hart Ransom Acad Charter   Susan Janis, teacher  
"Home"**

I was born in Modesto California, and what makes me glad to live in California is that it is my home. From my wonderful school and church community, to the beautiful art plastered all over the city,

it is my home and I would not change it for the world. However, a sad reality for many Californians is that they have no home. The homeless population is roughly 114,000 in California. There are too many people uncared for, unloved, tired, hungry, and not being able to feel at home.

D.J Jaffe mentions in his book *Insane Consequences* that “At minimum, 25 percent of the American homeless—140,000 individuals—were seriously mentally ill at any given point in time”. At twenty-five percent, mental illness is an immense part of the homeless population and not funding certain organizations that help the mentally ill and help the homeless only exacerbates the situation.

The homeless in California have poor access to health care and mental health facilities. The mental health facilities that were funded by the Kennedy administration in the 1960s were closed without an alternative solution. In the early 1980s President Reagan discarded a law that provided services for the mentally ill. These two occurrences are a factor **in** why we have seen an increase in homelessness in the past three decades. If we want to provide an in depth solution, we have to look at better funding for mental health services.

The basic needs of any human being are food, shelter, water, and clothing. If the state government does not address those needs for the homeless of California, a feeling of fear, desperation, and anxiety only increases. Imagine if someone did not know where they are going to sleep the next night or where their next meal will come from, or how they will survive the winter. Let's say someone is walking outside; it is so cold that all they want to do is get inside into the warmth of a home. The homeless feel that every day in the winter, but they can not go inside because they do not have a home. They do not have heaters for the winter or air conditioners for the summer. They have to figure out how to survive by themselves and sometimes they do not survive.

If the homeless were able to know and understand what is available to them, it would provide more opportunities to get them off the streets. It would also be beneficial to our community to have safer and cleaner parks and downtown areas. It is important to look at the homeless crisis in California from all different angles and not just patch certain issues. If we all work together to make a group, organization, or a community to cover every angle on homelessness and mental illness, maybe the homeless and mentally ill can feel at home just as much as as I do. Words 485

to be a Californian. Peers at my school speak Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin, Indonesian, Korean, Hmong and Russian among others. My hometown of Turlock is continually hosting cultural events representing its diverse residents' countries of origin. I regularly attend my friends' cultural celebrations such as a quinceañeras, sünnets and even a Tainan ceremony.

Participating in these cultural events and learning about different languages allows me to better understand my peers and better serve my community, beginning in my hometown of Turlock and beyond, ensuring California is a wonderful place in which to live, learn and work.

Yet, although one of my friend's parents work two jobs, picking grapes and maintaining bees, he couldn't afford our school's lunches because of their immigration status. I couldn't understand how his parents, working 12-14 hours a day, had difficulty providing for their son. I eventually learned his parents were undocumented and their employers paid them \$5/hour despite the minimum wage being \$11. He was worried that applying for the school lunch program would get his parents deported. When he injured his leg at one point, he was hesitant to get it treated due to the manner in which the non-Spanish speaking staff treated his parents because of their uninsured status and poor English.

The Hippocratic Oath, coined in the 19th century by an English doctor, requires that above all, a physician do no harm. As a volunteer at a local medical clinic, I interpret this to mean that any patient who enters our clinic, regardless of status, deserves to be treated with respect and made to feel welcome in order to facilitate their healing. It's why I volunteered as a data collector for a language related medical study on patient interaction.

Many patients seen at a clinic where I volunteer have limited English proficiency or speak no English at all. A study by Dr. Nancy Longnecker found that a breakdown in communication leads to lower satisfaction and increased misunderstandings between the patient and physician. These in turn are conducive to lower quality of care and mistrust. It was also discovered that patients are far more satisfied with a visit when they are able to connect and establish trust with their provider. Due to the growing diversity of California, I feel greater attention must be placed on interpreter mediated visits to establish quality care for patients.

Glenn Flores, a pediatrician and professor at University of Connecticut School of Medicine, <sup>2</sup> indicates that medically trained



of homeless people and increasing affordable housing, more Californians would be able to live successful lives and have the opportunity to enjoy the beautiful state we live in. By helping homeless people back into the folds of society, an eventual boost to the workforce would occur. This boost would help the economy and help fund other needed improvements to our state. An investment in the homeless population would be one which would positively affect our future.

By working to improve the quality of life in our state, California could effectively improve the quality of life for the rest of the world. This state could prove to other nations the possibility of successfully helping others while also keeping economic security. If this is shown, other nations would look to California as a model for success. We can show the world how to implement basic acts of human kindness on a large scale. The innovative actions California is willing to make in order to form a better society is one of the many reasons that make me proud to live in this amazing state.

Word Count: 988

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#### Division I - 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

**Ashish Thakur** Modesto HS **Kerry Castellani, teacher**  
"True Diversity"

I consider myself a Californian, born and bred. One of my favorite things about the Golden State is the true diversity I've experienced here. From the time I was a toddler, my Central Valley community has been a rich tapestry of diverse cultural groups. Communities all over our great state echo this diverse linguistic and cultural fabric that make me proud

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### Division III - 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

**Francis Evans Hart Ransom Acad Charter Susan Janis, teacher**  
**“Childhood Poverty”**

I love being a Californian. I am grateful to live in California for the many diverse ethnic groups that live here. Their interesting cultures bring amazing experiences and even delicious foods. Also, many people come to the Golden State for vacations because of our mild Mediterranean climate. That climate also allows us to grow healthy and delicious fruits and vegetables. California is an extremely rich state that has the fifth largest economy in the world. Unfortunately, while California is prosperous, it has the highest rate of childhood poverty in the United States.

There are many reasons why children live in poverty in California. Some people may think that people are not working hard enough. However, about 84% of children who live in poverty live in a home where at least one adult is working (HUD.gov). One cause of childhood poverty is the high cost of housing. "31 percent pay more than half their income towards housing." (ppic.org) Finally, children are suffering with childhood poverty because people are not making enough money. The minimum wage in California is \$11.00 an hour. That won't cover a family's needs. Also, we do not provide the suffering children with enough food, healthcare, and quality education.

We need to find solutions to end childhood poverty in California. One solution is to increase the minimum wage. When housing costs are too high, the government can help poor families in need with subsidies such as Section 8. Section 8 authorizes the payment of rental housing assistance for families (HUD.gov). We can also increase CalWorks and CalFresh, (ppic.org) which are programs that provide financial help, food for low income families, and grants that provide free school supplies, and free meals throughout schools.

There are approximately 269,000 children who are homeless and living in poverty in California. Poor children are more likely to become poor adults and less likely to graduate from high school. How can we live in such a prosperous state and yet have children who are suffering in poverty?

The task of tackling homelessness seems daunting only because the issue needs to be handled in several different ways to truly be effective. First, the current homeless population needs to be helped. The creation of no cost housing specifically designed for vulnerable homeless people is a possible solution. This would provide safety for the most at-risk groups of homeless people, such as: women with young children, the disabled - both physically and mentally - and the elderly. As it would be unrealistic to provide housing for the entire homeless population at once, the people who are most threatened by homelessness should be helped first. In these housing developments, there should be qualified therapists present to provide support and aid. There should also be professionals to teach skills which will allow people to enter the workforce and become productive members of this society. In addition to helping the most at-risk sector of the homeless population, there needs to be increased aid available for those who are not in imminent danger due to homelessness. There should be help centers created in neighborhoods with a disproportionately high homeless population. These centers would provide much needed food and clothing under the condition that the homeless person receive free help from the same therapists and professionals assigned to the housing units. In addition to this, the centers would provide access to job opportunities in the community. Not only would the centers provide aid for the homeless, they would also have the potential to help the people with low incomes struggling economically.

To prevent future homelessness, the state of California needs to start taking action now. Recently, the state decided not to repeal the Costa Hawkins Rental Housing Act, which limits rent control in the state. Repealing this act would have allowed for California to provide more available affordable housing options for its residences. In addition to an act like this, there should be increased legislature like this to ensure affordable housing to Californians. This could be in the form of the creation of apartments or neighborhoods which would be permanently sold and marketed as affordable. These houses would only be available to those who are truly in need of a low cost housing alternative. These housing developments would be payed for partially from a tax on the people of California. By always having affordable housing, people who become unable to afford their current living situation will have an alternative to homelessness.

These improvements would greatly benefit the entirety of California, not just those who suffer from homelessness. By decreasing the number

### Division I - 1<sup>st</sup> Place

**Makens Turner Peter Johansen HS Nicole Evans, teacher**  
**“California: My Home”**

California is a state which many people find themselves proud to reside in. Growing up in this state has taught me in ways that wouldn't have been possible had I lived somewhere which was less ethnically diverse. I've been shown completely new languages and cultures which I find beautiful. Going to school with people of such varying ethnic backgrounds has shown me, on a small scale, how unique the human condition is. People live in completely different ways from one another. With such vast differences between them, it can seem hard to connect with someone when you know nothing about their culture. In the same sense, this variety has also brought me closer to people who are different from me. I now have a deeper understanding of how others live. This state has taught me compassion and respect for others. I've been shown time and time again that we are all connected and have similarities, even if, at first, it may seem unlikely. I am truly thankful that I live in a state which has inspired me to learn more about other cultures and peoples.

California, like any state, is not without its problems. A major issue facing California is the ever-increasing homeless population. The number of homeless people jumped to 14% between 2016 and 2017, according to the Annual Homeless Assessment Report. When compared to the data taken over the last seven years, which set the increase at only 9%, this number is truly shocking. California has the third highest homeless population in the country. This has been caused, in part, by the lack of affordable housing. In larger cities, where homeless populations tend to increase the fastest, the cost of housing is almost unimaginable. According to the Huffington Post, the average person in Los Angeles needs to make \$74,371 annually in order to live comfortably in the city. The median income for people living in Los Angeles is only \$48,682. This means that a large portion of the population is unable to afford basic necessities. When looking at this data, it isn't hard to see why so many people are left homeless. Without money left over after rent and food, many people in larger cities do not have adequate savings. This means any accident could easily be catastrophic to their lives.

With the solutions I have given, children will not wake up hungry and will have homes and be like other children. This can make a positive difference in the lives of all Californians. Children are a priceless gift to us, and we don't want them to have their lives limited by poverty. Word Count: 390

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### Division II - 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

**Caleb Coston Independent Study Susan Janis, teacher**  
**“Life Changing Choices”**

While visiting California, President Theodore Roosevelt wisely stated, “I ask that we keep in mind not only our own interests, but the interests of our children. Any generation fit to do its work must work for the future, for the people of the future, as well as for itself.” Due to a mild climate and diversity of land types, California is one of the most inviting places in the world. Its regions include desert, valley, mountains, and coast. California is a beautiful and agriculturally diverse state. It produces much of the country's produce, mainly in the Central Valley. By preserving our water supply, we will successfully meet the challenges of creating a community that allows people to live and thrive safely together.

Being one of the most productive and populated states in America, it would be devastating if California lost its most precious resource, water. Because California experiences severe droughts, to protect our lifeline we must regulate our water usage. Water is a limited resource that can be replenished and preserved with time and effort. We need to sustain our most necessary resource.

One solution to California's water problem is to require counties to replenish groundwater. Ellen Hanak, an expert on water policy in California gave a presentation reporting survey findings on groundwater

recharge in the San Joaquin Valley. She described this area as “a region that is home to more than four million people, half the state's agricultural output, and most of its critically over-drafted groundwater basins, where pumping exceeds replenishment. Consequences include dry wells, sinking lands, and reduced supplies to weather future droughts” (Hanak). We can harness overflow on wet years and pump it back into our thirsty aquifers. Replenishing our groundwater is vital to us and future generations.

Helen Keller once stated, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” There are many ways to solve our water crisis. We can conserve our water usage by taking shorter showers and turning the water off when it is not being used. We also need to address our leaky pipes. Research shows “California could meet half its mandate to save water just by fixing leaky pipes” (Woody). These changes might seem minute, but if millions of people do this it would help drastically. Also, we can share solutions to this problem with our neighbors, relatives, and whole community. If citizens cut their water usage we can greatly impact California's quickly diminishing water source. This problem and its solutions need to be known and solved if we want to have a sustainable water source.

California is an agriculturally rich state. Without water, one of California's greatest blessings is lost. I know firsthand what the repercussions of unmanaged water are. In 2014, my family nearly had to move out of California due to lowering groundwater levels in our area. If we regulate and replenish our water, Californians will have peace of mind knowing they have protected their homeland that is so dear to them.  
498 Words

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## Division IV Grades 5 & 6

Student	School	Teacher
<b>First Place</b>		
1st Place *	Andrew Swehla	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr Susan Janis
<b>Second Place</b>		
2nd Place	Connor Swearingen	Independent Study Susan Janis
<b>Third Place</b>		
3rd Place	Claire Park	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr Susan Janis
<b>Honorable Mention</b>		
Hon Men	Rylee Hull	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr Susan Janis
Hon Men*	Erin Leamy	John Fremont OP L. Hanzel-Sello
Hon Men*	Sabrina Toor	Agnes Baptist Elem Toni David
<b>Finalist</b>		
Finalist	Kayvan Banankhah	Independent Study Susan Janis
Finalist	Noah Bird	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr Susan Janis
Finalist	Naseeb Deol	Agnes Baptist Elem Michelle Danner
Finalist	Kaveri Gupta	Agnes Baptist Elem Michelle Danner
Finalist	Leena Gupta	Agnes Baptist Elem Michelle Danner
Finalist	Mihir Mathai	Agnes Baptist Elem Toni David
Finalist	Jacob Miller	Agnes Baptist Elem Michelle Danner
Finalist	Aliyah Mim	Agnes Baptist Elem Toni David
Finalist	Aaryan Mistry	Agnes Baptist Elem Toni David
Finalist	Mason Raposa	Agnes Baptist Elem Michelle Danner
Finalist	Justina Shehata	Agnes Baptist Elem Toni David
Finalist	Quinn Swearingen	Independent Study Susan Janis
Finalist	Isabella Verdugo	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr Susan Janis
Finalist	Landyn Wetzel	Agnes Baptist Elem Michelle Danner
<b>School Winner</b>		
School Winner	Bobby Nieto	Hickman Middle School Michelle Blaze
School Winner	Gabriel Racela	Daniel J. Savage MS Kari Paulsen
School Winner	Payton Topie	Valley Home Elem Debbie Stewart
School Winner	Courtney Wilson	Somerset MS Denise Argain

\* School Winner, recognized for the top essay from a school that has submitted 10 or more essays in the Division

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## Division III Grades 7 & 8

	Student	School	Teacher
<b>First Place</b>			
1st Place *	Stella Whitler	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
<b>Second Place</b>			
2nd Place	Francis Evans	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
<b>Third Place</b>			
3rd Place	Caleb Coston	Independent Study	Susan Janis
<b>Honorable Mention</b>			
Hon Men	Jonah Bird	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Hon Men	Elise Hayden	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Hon Men	Brooklynn Scott	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
<b>Finalist</b>			
Finalist *	Athena Envieh	Turlock Jr HS	Denise Nulph
Finalist *	Micah Kakuno	Oakdale Jr HS	D. Hawksworth
Finalist *	Audrey Kellert	Prescott Jr. High	Maia Tobin
Finalist *	Carly Kolsky	Hickman Charter Elem	Tracy Kline & Bret Bergthold
Finalist *	Angelina Lucca	Sacred Heart , Turlock	Elaine Magni
Finalist	Lauren Bowman	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Finalist	Breanna Guillermo	Oakdale Jr HS	D. Hawksworth
Finalist	Brooke Hayden	Oakdale Jr HS	D. Hawksworth
Finalist	Alphia Jeevan	Oakdale Jr HS	D. Hawksworth
Finalist	Katelyn Kang	Prescott Jr. High	Maia Tobin
Finalist	Cole Kirschner	Oakdale Jr HS	D. Hawksworth
Finalist	Catherine Mullins	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Finalist	Irina Putinsev	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Finalist	Spencer von Savoye	Oakdale Jr HS	D. Hawksworth
<b>School Winner</b>			
School Winner	Norah O'Campo	Hickman Middle School	Michelle Blaze

- School Winner, recognized for the top essay from a school that has submitted 10 or more essays in the Division

## Division IV - 1<sup>st</sup> Place

**Andrew Swehla Hart Ransom Acad Charter Susan Janis, teacher  
"Community Gardens"**

When I turned nine, I asked my mother for a planter bed to grow my own vegetables. I have grown up in a household where my parents encourage me to plant my own garden like they do every year. There is nothing like eating fresh pesto from the basil that you planted months ago. Rarely a summer day passes by when I am not tending my garden. What I love about living in California is the variety of fresh produce that is grown here. The ideal climate is the reason why our state produces over a third of the country's vegetables and two-thirds of the country's fruits and nuts. (California) Even with all the fresh food in our state, the youth obesity rate is incredibly high. Growing ones own food with the help of community gardens can help to lower our youth obesity rate in California, thereby increasing the overall well-being of Californians.

Our youth in California have an obesity problem that needs to be confronted. In 2016, 40.7% of children ages 12-17 were overweight or obese. (Healthy) Obesity can lead to ailments such as diabetes or high blood pressure, which could lead to death. It is sad how California is the bread basket of the world, and yet we have so many people eating processed and unhealthy foods. Our soil is so rich here, that I can even find tomato plants sprouting up in my alley that I never planted.

One way to decrease obesity is for people to grow their own foods, because freshly grown foods contain more nutrients than store bought and processed foods. Fresh foods can be purchased from certain stores and markets, but growing food in a community garden is more beneficial because it is cheaper, provides exercise, and teaches good eating habits. Statistically, people who garden eat more fruits and vegetables, and this has a long term impact on a person's dietary behavior (Community)

A community garden is a plot of land set aside by either a city, a church, or another non profit that serve as garden space for people who do not have the yard to plant a garden. Some community gardens give whole planter boxes to individuals, while others give big plots to entire

families. In Modesto, The Church of the Brethren hosts a community garden of 19x19 foot plots that can be used by anyone who wants to grow food or flowers. (Seeds) You can find community gardens in towns and cities, but California needs more in order to help cure and prevent obesity and make a positive difference in the lives of Californians.

I will never forget last spring when I harvested my Fava beans. The experience of harvesting ones own food gives a person peace and happiness with the earth. It is time for people to learn that there is nothing better or healthier than freshly grown foods. Through an increase in community gardens, youth obesity can be reduced. Word Count 497

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#### **Division IV - 2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

##### **Connor Swearingen Independent Study Susan Janis, teacher "Preventing School Shootings"**

The United States is a strong country, and one of its most important states is California. California is a great place to live and visit. It has excellent weather, many attractions to visit, and it has an immense economy. The weather is beautiful because of the California current. There are many places to visit and explore such as Disneyland, Legoland, Seaworld, and many others. California also has the fifth largest economy in the world (Perch). California is a prestigious place to live, but kids are in danger every day because of the possibility of school shootings. There have been many major school shootings in our country. The safety of our schools is, all in all, pretty low and many more school shootings may happen. Since 2013, there have been at least 355 school shootings in the U.S and seventeen have been in California. In the year 2017, there were sixty-five school shootings, with four occurring in California. These statistics show that the safety of schools is at risk (everytownresearch).

#### **Division III (Grades 7-8) & Division IV (Grades 5-6)**

The 2019 Peace Essay Contest invites you to reflect on the many positive things living in California offers and to also think about what might need to be improved. Write your essay of **250 – 500 words** following the prompt below:

**Begin** your essay by briefly describing what makes you glad to live in California.

Considering the general categories listed in the introduction, or adding one of your own, choose a specific area that you think could be improved to provide a better quality of life for those who live in California. Do some research about your choice. Then, continuing your essay,

· **Identify and describe** the specific area that concerns or worries you.

**Share** some ideas from your research that might help improve it.

**Conclude** your essay by explaining why this improvement would make a positive difference in the lives of Californians. (Include your word count at the end of your essay.)

## Division II Grades 9 & 10

	Student	School	Teacher
<b>First Place</b>			
First Place	Emily Swehla	Independent Study	Susan Janis
<b>Second Place</b>			
Second Place *	Paola Campos	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
<b>Third Place</b>			
Third Place	Reza Banankhah	Independent Study	Susan Janis
<b>Honorable Mention</b>			
Hon Mention	Carson Carranza	Modesto HS	Kerry Castellani
Hon Mention	S. Kaur Hundal	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
Hon Mention	Maymuna Sabri	Whitmore Charter	Virginia Aguilera
<b>Finalist</b>			
Finalist	Breana Bravo	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
Finalist	Destinee Cox	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
Finalist	Areli Delgado	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
Finalist	Isabella Dvarte	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
Finalist	Samantha Espinoza	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
Finalist	Isabel Gutierrez	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
Finalist	Ahtziri Martinez	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
Finalist	Zaida Martinez	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
Finalist	Virginia Moore	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
Finalist	Aileen Padilla	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
Finalist	Joshua Resurreccion	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
Finalist	Jose Sanchez	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
Finalist	Karanjot Singh	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
Finalist	Ximena Soltero	Central Valley HS	Megan Oliveria
<b>School Winner</b>			
School Winner	Drake Heffington	Oakdale Charter	J. Ves'sells

\* School Winner, recognized for the top essay from a school that has submitted 10 or more essays in the Division

One of the many ways we can prevent school shootings is by having metal detectors at security checkpoints such as airports have (Saidi). This can help prevent people from sneaking into areas with guns or weapons at hand. We could also hire guards to stop suspicious people from entering, or to operate security checkpoints and metal detectors (Saidi). Some school shootings are caused by people who are unhappy or feeling isolated. When people are alone or secluded, they can become depressed or suicidal, leading them to commit school shootings. This is a major problem that needs to be solved to help stop school shootings (Seifert).

We can also prevent school shootings in other ways. For example, preventing people who are mentally ill or who have been hospitalized from buying a gun (injury). This will decrease the chance of the mentally ill from committing a school shooting. Another way we could stop school shootings is by using social media to identify and track growing school shooter threats (Hovitz). This will stop school shooters from even starting a school shooting in the first place. Finally, we can prevent or help stop school shootings by decreasing the number of bullies in real life or in social media (Hovitz). With fewer bullies, children will not become suicidal because of the stress of being bullied.

These changes would improve the lives of Californians by letting them know that their children are safe and the children themselves feel safe at school every day. Schools are meant to educate children and not to make them worried about being hurt or killed. We need to all work together to be able to make schools in California safer for children.

442 words

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**Division IV - 3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

**Claire Park Hart Ransom Acad Charter Susan Janis, teacher  
"Reading Crisis"**

What makes me glad to live in California is my education. Especially reading. I am passionate about books. I read every day. I believe every man, women and child should have access to books and the ability to learn to read. By being a Girl Scout, I have the ability to join forces with the community to promote literacy within the community.

One of my growing concerns is the low literacy rates. In California, twenty-five percent of the state's six million students are unable to perform basic reading skills (Sand). Fifty percentage of adults cannot read a book written at an eighth-grade level (Literacy Project). As an avid reader myself, improving the literacy among my peers and adults is important to me. In 2013, Stanislaus County Office of Education launched the Destination Graduation Initiative. This is a multi-year, collaborative effort with schools and organizations within the community, focusing on students receiving a high school diploma.

Over seventy percent of third graders do not read at grade level in Stanislaus County (Progress Report). Based on the CAASPP testing, in 2016, sixty percent of third through sixth graders had not met state standard testing levels (CAASPP). To help with the reading crisis, my Girl Scout troop and I held a book drive, collected over two hundred books, and made three Little Free Libraries to place within the community. A Little Free Library is a "take a book, return a book" free book exchange. They often resemble miniature birdhouses. The Stanislaus Reads Program has twenty-three Little Free Libraries part of the pilot program placed within pilot schools and community partners. Our troop libraries will make the twenty-sixth library for the project.

Other ideas could include: peer reading groups in and out of schools. By having older fluent readers team up with young readers to create

**Division I Grades 11 & 12**

	<b>Student</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Teacher</b>
<b>First Place</b>			
1st Place	Makens Turner	Peter Johansen HS	Nicole Evans
<b>Second Place</b>			
2nd Place	Ashish Thakur	Modesto HS	Kerry Castellani
<b>Third Place</b>			
3rd Place	Molly Howard	Whitmore Charter HS	Kelly Hayes
<b>Honorable Mention</b>			
Hon Men *	Jessie Lawrence	Hughson HS	Karalee Ruelas
Hon Men	Mary Frey	Our Lady, Gd Counsel	Michelle Frey
Hon Men	Marcos Martinez	Hughson HS	Karalee Ruelas
<b>Finalist</b>			
Finalist *	Cheyenne Gonzales	Patterson HS	Valerie Jamieson
Finalist *	Kylia BThompson	Oakdale Charter	J. Ves'sells
Finalist	Cecilia Alvarez	Central Catholic HS	Susan Dillon
Finalist	Michelle Borges	Hughson HS	Karalee Ruelas
Finalist	Kendra Boyd	Oakdale Charter	J. Ves'sells
Finalist	Clara den Dulk	Hughson HS	Karalee Ruelas
Finalist	Claire Dieker	Hughson HS	Karalee Ruelas
Finalist	Emily Fife	Hughson HS	Karalee Ruelas
Finalist	Clarissa Madrigal	Whitmore Charter HS	Kelly Hayes
Finalist	Daisy Perez	Peter Johansen HS	Nicole Evans
Finalist	Karla Perez	Patterson HS	Valerie Jamieson
Finalist	Emily Quillen	Hughson HS	Karalee Ruelas
Finalist	Maryam Sabri	Whitmore Charter HS	Kelly Hayes
Finalist	Zoe Zuidema	Peter Johansen HS	Jason Hightman

\* School Winner, recognized for the top essay from a school that has submitted 10 or more essays in the Division



## Division I (Grades 11-12) & Division II (Grades 9-10)

The 2019 Peace Essay Contest invites you to reflect on the many positive things living in California offers and to also think about what might need to be improved. Write your essay of **500-1000 words** following the prompt below:

**Begin** your essay by briefly describing what makes you glad to live in California.

Considering the general categories listed in the introduction, or adding one of your own, choose a specific area that you think could be improved to provide a better quality of life for those who live in California. Do some research about your choice. Then, continuing your essay,

- **Identify and describe** the specific area that concerns or worries you.
- **Share** some ideas from your research that might help improve it.
- **Explain** why this improvement would make a positive difference in the lives of Californians.

**Conclude** your essay by explaining how working to improve life in our state is an important step toward creating a more just and peaceful world. (Include your word count at the end of your essay.)

reading buddies, older readers teach younger readers to sound out words, read to and with each other, more introductions to the local library, summer reading programs through schools and community, and expanding kindergarten from half day to full days.

Creating Destination Graduation Initiative, creating more programs, partnering with schools and keeping Little Free Libraries filled with books, will hopefully inspire kids and adults to become avid readers like myself. Since, Stanislaus Reads Program has been in place reading rates have already increased 3.61% from 2016-2018. Having the opportunity to get a strong education makes a positive difference in the lives of Californians.

Word count 413

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## **California**

### SCREENING AND JUDGING OF ESSAYS

California is a diverse and incredible place to live. From the lowest desert to the towering mountain peaks, the multitude of eco-regions are home to a vast variety of plants and animals as well as humans. Over 800 miles of coastline grace our state and a large agricultural economy produces two thirds of all the fruits and nuts and half of the vegetables grown in the U.S.

California has big cities as well as a landscape dotted by small towns. It is a testing ground for renewable energy and is well known for being on the cutting edge of technology. California has the largest public university system in the nation as well as world-renowned public and private universities.

California has a history that includes people from many ethnic groups around the world, who each bring unique experiences & perspective to our state. A wide range of languages, traditions, stories, arts and music can be found among Californians.

Numerous categories make up the whole experience of a state. Political, environmental, wildlife and land conservation, ethnic diversity, job opportunities, health and social services, education, and housing are just a few. Within each of these categories are the day-to-day experiences of the people who call this state their home.

Wildfires, mudslides, drought and earthquakes are all hazards of living in California. In addition to dealing with these occurrences, we must successfully meet the challenges of creating a community that allows people to live and thrive safely together. The 2019 Peace Essay Contest invites students to research, write, and submit an expository essay addressing this prompt and following the submission rules.

Selection of essay finalists and winners is a completely blind process. After all of the essays are submitted in November, each essay is assigned a unique number, which is written on both the essay and the submittal form. The submittal forms are removed and given to our data base administrator. He logs them into the data base. No one else has access to the data base or submittal forms thereafter. There are no identifying marks on the essays except the assigned number. The essays go through several rounds of screening, with 20 of the best essays picked and passed to the next level and combined with other best essays at that level. Finally at the highest screening level, 20 essays are picked in each division as Finalists. Finalists essays go to four judges in each division. The judges have 3 weeks to review and rank their essays. The 16 judges met on the evenings of January 28 and 29 (two divisions each evening) to discuss their recommendations and come up with a consensus of the winners, honorable mentions and school winners. Only after the judges have met and submitted their selections (by the code number) to the data base administrator, are the winners known.

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### *2019 Peace Essay Contest*



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