

2024 MLK Contest Entry

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Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a great man who touched all American hearts and influenced the United States to change into a greater nation. Born on January 15, 1929 at Atlanta, Georgia, Dr. King was a Baptist minister, social activist, and visionary leader. He is most known for his leadership of the American civil rights movement in the 1960s, a nationwide movement for equal rights for African Americans. His ideology called for the end of segregation and for the nation to come together as the united land of the free. Martin Luther King Jr.'s principles and philosophy are an inspiration for us to transform our world, our community, our people, and our lives to promote peace and equality.

Looking at one of his quotes from 1963 from his book Strength to Love, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that," it represents Dr. King's views on life and gives a solution to how we, as Americans, can "drive out darkness" in ourselves and the world. By his emphasis on how only "light" and only "love" can defeat "darkness" and "hate", he gives a notion that the only way to eradicate the poison in our society is to kill them with kindness. When we exercise the principles of goodness, equality, justice, and unity, we can stop the hate and violence that occur when faced with our differences. As Dr. King states, accepting and appreciating everyone for who they are can reconstruct this community infested with separation into a better place where we can be united.

There are many ways we can implement his philosophy into our collective lives. For one, we can work together to combat inequality happening in our community by treating everyone with respect and dignity without considering their class, status, gender, and race. It takes only

one person to do the right thing to motivate younger and older generations around them to follow suit. Moreover, instead of resorting to violence, we can practice our right of free speech by peacefully protesting and vocalizing our opinions to the public following Martin Luther King Jr's example during the civil rights movement. Voicing what we believe are right will protect against acts of wrongdoings and corruptness and grant positive changes to our growing community. Dr. King is an inspiration to me to peacefully fight against injustice even if no one else is and to never give up on my dreams. Because of his determination and strength, I am inspired everyday to follow his example and work hard towards my dreams and what I believe in, for I know I can make a difference in this world even if it is one step at a time. All in all, we can use Martin Luther King Jr's ideas and actions to influence our daily lives to make a change for the better.

Some solutions I would offer to play out Dr. King's vision in my community would be to start an "Older Brother/Older Sister" program, organize events that celebrate diverse cultures, and start a program that lets teens and young adults in Brookings to talk and debate about regional, nation, and worldly problems happening contemporary. Firstly, I would like to suggest a mentorship program in Brookings that pairs an at-risk child with a volunteering young adult, teenager, or adult who will give guidance and mentorship when the parent or guardian is unable to. Having this "Older Brother/Older Sister" will give the mentees the opportunity to grow self-confidence, create healthy relationships, and get the support to do well in academics and activities. Moreover, this also benefits the mentor by expanding their leadership skills, giving them insight into adolescence development, giving them responsibilities, and improving their supervisory skills. Having this system in place will give less fortunate children an opportunity for empowerment and promote peace, self-development, and self-freedom in this town.

Moreover, having events that celebrate the different cultures in this community will help promote everyone's sense of belonging. Organizing gatherings that gives a space for anyone to appreciate different cultural holidays such as Hanukkah, Lunar New Year, the Dia de los Muertos, and other cultural celebrations with others will promote exposure and appreciation for the unique traditions and backgrounds that are all present in this town. Adults can help implement this solution by putting up notices on the newspaper and spreading the word; young adults can also help by volunteering to help set up the spaces for the gatherings. Furthermore, another solution I have to promote equity in Brookings is starting a program that encourages young adults to communicate among other community members of their age from diverse backgrounds about different public issues. This will give a space for community members to listen to other people's opinions and perspectives and find solutions that agree with everyone promoting equality. Adults can help with this by providing a space for members to meet regularly. To summarize, I strongly believe that these solutions will help the community live out Dr. King's dream of fairness, peace, and acceptance among everyone.

The legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. on civil rights still has an effect on us today. It inspires us to live out what he worked so hard to do and what he died doing. It inspires us to never give up on what we believe is morally right even if that means being an outsider. Using his principles and ideology, we as ourselves, as community, as citizens of the United States, can transform this world into a better one; one that is free from prejudice and where everyone is united, as humans. From Martin Luther King Jr's own words, let us, "From every mountainside, let freedom ring."