

2024 MLK Contest Entry

Dr. King, one of the most admired and respected human rights activists and Nobel Prize winners, has always been an admiration to me. I remember reading books about his life when I was young. One particular children's book by Meltzer continues to be one of my favorites. The book describes how Dr. King encountered marginalization when he was young due to his race. He would become upset about these incidents; however, his mother would tell him that he should never let hate take over his heart and that he needed to love people regardless of their behavior. His mother's advice shaped his thoughts, beliefs, and, most importantly, moral grounds from which he functions. His quote: "The time is always right to do what is right." reveals Dr. King's character and his strong moral principles. That is why I chose this quote.

Given his personality and core values, it is not surprising that Dr. King encouraged us to do what is right courageously. This statement has implications at different levels. At the individual level, it means taking action when we see people engage in unjust, insensitive, or harmful behaviors. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2019), one in five students indicated being bullied in school. A significant number of these students reported being bullied in public places in the school. This means that others watched the emotional or physical assault but chose not to do "the right thing." Sadly, 41% of the bullied students indicated they expected to be exposed to the same violence again. These students indicated they got bullied because of their physical appearance, race, and sexual orientation, etc. One cannot stop thinking about the transformative impact of Dr. King's words if they become part of our value system. What if we all operate from a high moral compass, like Dr. King? I believe that the schools would be safer where we all feel free to learn, explore, and grow.

At the global level, we are experiencing similar types of conflict.

According to the Armed Conflict Locations & Event Data Project (ACLED), a significant portion of the world is in major conflicts that claim a large number of innocent people's lives. To give some examples, Ukraine and Russia have been at war, which caused significant casualties and costs to both countries. More recently, the Israel-Hamas conflict dominated the media, exposing the scary and ugly face of war. Some claimed that nearly 19,000 people died as a result of this conflict. The Institute for Economics and Peace's annual Global Peace Index revealed that more than 238,000 people were killed in global conflicts last year, a 96% increase year over year in deaths related to disputes. Perhaps being somewhat naïve, I cannot stop getting discouraged about senseless and pervasive wars that impact all of us.

During these times, I understood how powerful Dr. King's message was to us and the whole world. I know that every one of us, regardless of our age and power, must do the right thing to create a better life and opportunities for all of us. I will take this opportunity to dream about a community initiative that I would name "doing the right thing for our community." Under the supervision of our administrators in the school, my friends and I can collaborate to address poverty issues in our town. The poverty rate in Brookings is reported as 15.3%, or about 3% higher than the average poverty rate for our state. This initiative can include a food drive to provide food and a clothing drive to offer appropriate attire for individuals who are in need. I believe we can launch this initiative in Mickelson Middle School in January to honor Dr. King and his dedication to the betterment of marginalized communities. As Martin Luther King said, "our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

