

As always, I was remarkably impressed with the quality of this year's entries in the persuasive essay category of the WriteNow! contest. Many students addressed issues that were clearly important to them, and that passion was apparent in their writing. I was thrilled to see so many essays this year making arguments for important changes in our community and advocating for social justice and equity.

Some essays dealt with race; "I Don't See You" pushed back against the all-too-common phrase, "I don't see race," pointing out how harmful that rhetoric actual is, despite its well-meaning appearance on the surface. "Changing How Schools Deal with Racism" proposed that more meaningful actions must be taken against discriminatory behaviors right in our local schools, instead of the empty words that are often provided in response to these events.

Other essays addressed detrimental stigmas in our society that work to oppress marginalized groups in our community. "Putting a Period on the Tampon Tax" tackles a subject that, unfortunately, many young people are too uncomfortable to discuss because of the very stigma that allows the problem to continue; "Mental Illness Is Not Contagious" attacks an erroneous belief perpetuated by the media.

These essays demonstrate to me the interminable determination of our young people to better both the communities in which they live and the world as a whole. These students exemplify the hope and optimism that we should all place in our ability to change the systems that we sometimes see as inevitable. I feel so privileged to be a judge in this contest and thank each and every writer for their contribution.

-Anne Swanson