

# WRITING LESSON

## WHY BOTHER TO VOTE?



In the YES! Magazine article, **“Five Reasons to Vote Even When You Hate Everything on the Ballot,”** journalist and millennial **Yessenia Funes** shares her opinion on why it’s important to vote—even if you hate everything on the ballot. Funes points out what’s at stake, especially for those groups who vote the least, and options if you are dissatisfied with the slate of candidates.

Students will use Yessenia Funes’ article to write about whether it’s responsible not to vote in a presidential election.

**Part 1: The Article** “Five Reasons to Vote Even When You Hate Everything on the Ballot”

**Part 2: The Writing Prompt**

**Part 3: Writing Guidelines**

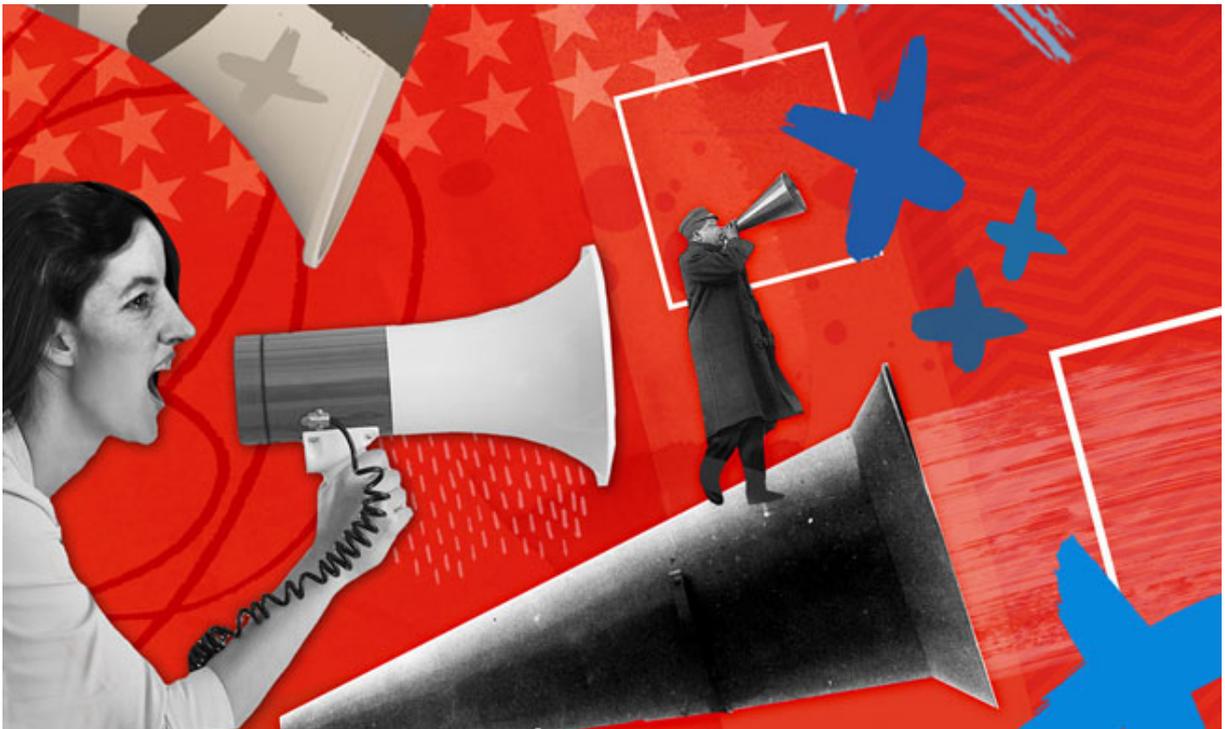
**Part 4: Evaluation Rubric**

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“Your Voice, Your Vote,” by Red Sheets, grade 8  
“Make a Choice,” by Catherine Skubiz, grade 11  
“The Voting Superhero,” by Ben Marcus, college freshman  
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“A Vote for the Voiceless,” by Norbu Sonam, grade 11

# 5 Reasons to Vote Even When You Hate Everything on the Ballot

Voting won't solve the nation's problems. But it's a start.



YES! Illustration by Eleanor Shakespeare

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By Yessenia Funes

On Election Day, what do you do if you were a die-hard Bernie Sanders fan and are now faced with a ballot that offers you a choice between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, whose favorability ratings are the worst among presidential candidates since CBS News and The New York Times started polling in 1984? Do you skip the booth altogether? Maybe. Only about 65 percent of Americans 18 and older are registered to vote, according to U.S. census data from 2012, and only about 58 percent actually vote.

Why vote if you hate everything on the ballot? Elections are about more than the candidates. They're about voters, too, and what issues they think deserve attention. Here are five reasons to voice those issues with a vote.

## 1. People who vote the least have the most to lose this election.

Latinos and Asian Americans are voting at historically high rates, but those rates are still

low. In the 2012 election, Asian Americans voted at a rate of 47 percent and Latinos at 48 percent, while African Americans voted at a rate of 66 percent, slightly above Whites at 64 percent. Together, Latinos and Asian Americans make up the majority of the U.S. immigrant population, the main target of Trump’s proposals to deport children of undocumented immigrants, even if the children are U.S. citizens by birth.

**In 2012, only 1 in 4 voters earning less than \$10,000 turned out. When these citizens don’t cast votes, their views remain un- or misrepresented.**

The deportation of U.S. birthright citizens isn’t likely, says Faye Hipsman, an associate policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute, but another Trump proposal is: ending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which protects from deportation those U.S. immigrants who arrived as children.

## **2. If you’re not down with a President Trump or President Clinton, there is always a third party.**

Do third-party votes matter? It’s complicated.

In 1992, Ross Perot won nearly 19 percent of the popular vote running as an independent candidate. That was nearly 20 million votes—plenty, but not enough to win an election. Some claim this cost Republican candidate George H.W. Bush a second term. Eight years later, Republican George W. Bush beat Democrat Al Gore. Gore won the popular vote but lost the electoral vote by five votes. The third-party candidate, Ralph Nader, was blamed. He gathered nearly 3 million votes, which some

argue would have gone to Gore. Then again, if Nader—or Perot—hadn’t been on the ballot, maybe their supporters wouldn’t have voted at all.

Voting is personal. People vote because they want to give voice to their beliefs.

Political activist Angela Davis told Democracy Now! in March that she had never voted for a candidate from either of the two major parties until Barack Obama. For her, electing the nation’s first Black president was personal, as were her previous boycotts of the two major parties.

## **3. Voting—in high or low numbers—can have serious consequences.**

The past two Obama elections show what’s possible when people of color come out to vote—even though they made up only about 27 percent of all voters nationwide for each election. The Pew Research Center points out that if it weren’t for his non-White constituency, Obama would have likely lost re-election in 2012, when 59 percent of White voters sided with Mitt Romney.

Why don’t people vote? Let’s look back, all the way to the 19th century.

In 1896, Republican William McKinley defeated Democrat William Jennings Bryan in an election that introduced many modern campaign techniques: cross-country speeches, extensive fundraising, and polling to target specific voters. Voter turnout before and during that election hovered around 80 percent; afterward, it averaged only 65 percent.

Historian Mark Kornbluh, in his 2000 book *Why America Stopped Voting: The Decline of Participatory Democracy and the Emergence of Modern American Politics*, blames a changing American culture. Politics lost its “entertainment value” as sports and theater hit the mainstream. Spectacle-style campaigns replaced participatory-style campaigns that invited the public to shape a candidate’s platform. Kornbluh theorizes that voters grew

disinterested when they felt unnecessary to a campaign.

#### **4. Let them know you exist and that you're not satisfied—write in a name.**

At the 2015 Equity Summit, Linda Sarsour, executive director of the Arab American Association of New York, spoke to people of color. “If voting didn’t matter, they wouldn’t be trying to take your right to vote away from you,” she said. If you don’t like the candidates, write in someone else, even your mother, Sarsour said. “The idea is to be counted.” Her argument is that people need to show up if they want politicians and decision-makers to listen to them. This is especially true for low-income people. In 2012, only 1 in 4 voters earning less than \$10,000 turned out. When these citizens don’t cast votes, their views remain un- or misrepresented.

At least seven write-in candidates have made it to Congress, including South Carolina Republican Strom Thurmond in his first bid for the U.S. Senate.

#### **5. Consider all the people who have an important opinion but can't vote.**

Some people can’t vote because their local laws require strict identification that they won’t have in time for Election Day or because their work schedules are so demanding they can’t take off five hours to wait in line. Shorter early-voting periods in states like Georgia and North Carolina also create obstacles for people. And some can’t vote because they aren’t naturalized citizens (even if they’ve spent most of their lives in the United States) or because a criminal record prevents them. Some 5.8 million Americans cannot vote because of a past felony conviction.

Americans are free to do as they please, and voting won’t solve the nation’s problems. But it’s a start—especially in this election, when the security of so many is at stake.

## Part 2: The Writing Prompt

Favorability ratings for presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump are at a historic low. Some people say they're not going to vote because there's no one on the ballot who deserves their vote, so why bother?

Is not voting a responsible option in a presidential election? Weigh in with your argument.

## Part 3: Writing Guidelines

The writing guidelines below are intended to be just that: a guide. Please adapt to fit your curriculum.

- Provide an original essay title.
- Reference the article.
- Limit the essay to no more than 700 words.
- Pay attention to grammar and organization.
- Be original. Provide personal examples and insights.
- Demonstrate clarity of content and ideas.

Common Core State Standards:

This writing exercise meets several Common Core State Standards for grades 6-12, including W. 9-10.3 and W. 9-10.14 for Writing, and RI. 9-10 and RI. 9-10.2 for Reading: Informational Text. This standard applies to other grade levels. "9-10" is used as an example.

How did this lesson work for you and your students?  
Share your feedback with us and other teachers  
by leaving a comment on our website:  
<http://bit.ly/2j4aGOZ>

## Part 4: Evaluation Rubric

Our rubric should serve as a guide, not an unreasonable or rigid standard. You've probably encountered similar rubrics before, but here are two quick pointers for using ours:

1. In the left column, find the criteria for evaluating essays.
2. In the top row, find scores from 4 (outstanding) to 1 (poor).

	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Focus on topic</b>	There is one clear, well-focused topic. Main idea is supported by detailed information.	Main idea is clear, but general.	Main idea is somewhat clear, but there is need for more supporting evidence.	Main idea is not clear. There is a seemingly random collection of information.
<b>Organization</b>	Details are placed in a logical order and the way they are presented effectively keeps the reader's interest.	Details are placed in a logical order, but the way they are presented sometimes make the writing less interesting.	Some details are not in a logical or expected order, and this distracts the reader.	There is no clear introduction of the main topic or structure of the paper.
<b>Originality and strength of ideas</b>	Formulates a thought-provoking, well-developed, and fairly original position on an issue.	Writer takes a clear position on an issue, though it is not developed fully.	Writer's position is evident, though it is vague.	Fails to take a clear position, or writer contradicts herself.
<b>Evidence and/or reasoning</b>	Provides specific reasons and/or evidence that demonstrate understanding and insight.	Offers adequate – though perhaps vague or incomplete – supporting reasons and/or evidence	Provides less than adequate or contradictory reasons or evidence to support position.	Offers only general reasons or evidence or none, or offers evidence contradictory to the writer's thesis or main idea.
<b>Command of grammar and conventions</b>	Command of conventions exhibited. Creative word choice and varied sentence structure.	Correct use of grammar and conventions (for the most part).	Weak control of grammar and conventions. Errors are distracting.	Use of grammar and conventions interferes with understanding.
<b>Voice</b>	Author's voice is strong and engaging. Draws reader in.	Writing attracts reader's interest. Author's voice shows engagement with the topic.	Technically well written; however, author's voice is weak.	Writing fails to engage the reader. Does not demonstrate writer's interest in topic.

\* Adapted from "Rubric for Editorial – Commentary Essay" from LAEP.org and "6+1 Traits of Writing Rubric" from ReadWriteThink.org.

## Your Choice, Your Vote

By Red Sheets, grade 8

My mom never lets me know who she's voting for in the primaries. Voting can be—is—such a personal thing, which is why it's no one's place to tell you to vote (or not). So, I suppose I'm straying out of my lane by telling you that you should absolutely vote. It's normal to try to convince people one way or another, isn't it?

According to YES! Magazine's article "5 Reasons to Vote Even When You Hate Everything on the Ballot" by Yessenia Funes, 65 percent of eligible voters are registered, and only 58 percent voted in the 2012 election. Why don't people vote? Some cite personal reasons and others are barred from it. But there is one pervasive thought circulating among eligible voters, and it's that your vote doesn't matter. This idea that your ballot doesn't count because other people will already determine the election is toxic. It perpetuates the notion that the system is rigged—that everyone needs to "open their eyes" to our corrupt government. To be fair, America is probably not the purest country in the world, but it is definitely far from the manipulative governments of countries like Russia. Conspiracy theorists may protest, but far-fetched theories have absolutely no place in a discussion of hard facts.

Facts do not lie. Politicians do. People who take every single word a politician says without a single grain of salt contribute to the problem—and they are known to believe in and broadcast false information everywhere. During this election, several print and electronic media outlets have also told us too many lies—one of those lies being that our votes don't matter.

Your vote does matter, whether you choose to utilize it or not. Even if you hate everything on the ballot, there is a reason to vote. Voting is one of the most American things one can do. If you have that power, you should use it. If you don't, and an unfit candidate comes into office, you have no right to complain, because you didn't try to sway the election in any way.

Many people feel trapped in a red-versus-blue party system and don't even think about other possibilities. On your ballot, there are hundreds of voting options. While many are from parties you've never heard of—and have no chance of winning due to the electoral college—they are still alternatives. Maybe you've never heard of Jill Stein or Gloria La Riva? If the Democrat and Republican nominees are unappealing, you might consider researching other candidates because the playing field is so much bigger than the media leads us to believe.

So you see the candidates listed on the ballot, and you still don't like any of them? There are more options, like the write-in box. Third party and write-in candidates can heavily influence—and even change—the outcome of an election. But a vote doesn't have to be just for a person. It can also be in support of an idea or a policy. Whether they're duller than listening to a lecture or repulsively disrespectful, some candidates can be unpleasant. Their actions and policies, however, speak volumes. Some people only see the policy. Some people only see the person. The ability to weigh both is a vital skill for intelligent and responsible voting. Once you see both, your decision

between candidates should be clear (or not).

Seeing that we might have our first woman president or we might have our first president with no experience in office, there is a strong desire to vote among many Americans. Even though my mom never tells me who she's voting for, this fall she showed me the filled-in box for president and told me that I'll remember this election forever— that I'll remember the urgent passion of the supporters on all sides and the impacts they've made. I sure hope that passion brings more people to the booths, because it truly doesn't matter which candidate wins. The American public has a greater power than it realizes, and I have a feeling they will—we will—discover our capabilities and make our thoughts loud and clear. What matters are the voices of individuals and whether or not that voice is heard. Because, ultimately, real people and real feelings are more important than a polling statistic.

Postscript: November 8th has come and passed, and the country exploded in its reaction when Donald Trump was voted the president-elect. When I looked up the number of people that voted this election, I was astonished. About fifty-eight percent of eligible Americans voted. That's forty-two percent of the voting population sitting out. Over 90 million people in the 2016 election chose not to vote. 90 million. 90 million is more than the total population of the United Kingdom and Australia combined. That, to me, is terrifying. Those voters could have determined the election, but instead, they chose to sit this one out. My stance on this issue remains the same. If you have the power to, you should vote.

## Make a Choice

By Catherine Skubiz, grade 11

During the 2008 presidential election, my father brought me with him to the polls. We walked into a large gymnasium, and scattered about were voting booths draped in soft, black fabric. I excitedly followed my father into a booth, gazing in wonder at the small screen with the names of the candidates. The faint glow emanating from the screen provided the only light; the black curtain shielded us from the world outside. My eight-year-old eyes watched my father in awe, his finger poised to highlight John McCain's name on the white screen. I felt a twinge of jealousy that I still had ten more years until I could vote.

The right to vote is a cornerstone of our democracy, the acknowledgement that every single citizen has a voice that can and should be expressed. A vote is more than the election itself; a vote represents the ability to choose. The failure to vote is the surrendering of our ability to choose; it is the rendering of oneself vulnerable to and dependent on the actions and choices of others. Only by voting can the American population continue to corroborate its freedom.

The ability to choose—regardless of the quality or quantity of possible choices—exists within us. Regardless of how unappealing the candidates' policies or character, the voters still have a choice between them. Everyone always has a choice, even if it's a difficult one.

Some people argue that not voting is a vote—that by refusing to take part, they are voting against the system. But

when all of the votes are counted, the “not votes” don't show up. Voting is the phone line from Americans to their leaders. Voters who chose to stay home may have been screaming with anger and resentment about their choices, but the nation never heard. Not voting is the taking of the proverbial rock, and rather than placing it in the basket, throwing it far out into the rushing river where it's lost and forgotten, swept away by the raging current of apathy and ignorance. The “not vote” sulks in the shadows, failing to comprehend why nobody can see it or hear its voice.

Voting is a census that only counts citizens with power. When the suffragists fought for the right to vote, they fought for the right to matter. They fought for their right to scream and be heard. They fought for their right to be truly free. Yessenia Funes quotes Linda Sarsour in her YES! Magazine article, “5 Reasons to Vote Even When You Hate Everything on the Ballot.” “If voting didn't matter, they wouldn't be trying to take your right to vote away from you.” Voting matters, because today as more states pass voter identification laws, these states attempt to choke and silence the voices of the underprivileged—dehumanizing and devaluing them. Voting matters, because as I remain excited to vote for the first time in 2020, I remember that had I been born a century earlier, I, along with every other woman in America, would be voting for the first time. Imagine a woman gazing down at her ballot, her eight-year-old daughter watching in awe

as her mother exercises her power for the first time.

In 2008, as I followed my father into the voting booth, millions of African Americans, previously disillusioned by a seemingly disinterested government, turned out to vote for Barack Obama, who shined as a beacon of change. These voters felt powerless, forgotten, and ignored until Obama specifically turned to them and promised change. Suddenly they felt powerful, propelling Obama to the presidency. In this year's election, as with every election, we have a choice. In 2008, as my eight-year-old eyes gazed in awe at the faint glow emanating from the screen, African American voters proved that when we make the choice to vote, we give ourselves the power to change the nation.

Postscript: Just as Barack Obama inspired many African Americans to vote in 2008, Donald Trump spoke to the white working class this election. Trump's victory doesn't alter the ideas in my essay; it reinforces them. The turnout of the white working class illustrates again the power of the vote, which voters will hopefully understand in 2020.

# The Voting Superhero

By Ben Marcus, college freshman

As kids we grew up wishing we could be superheroes. When I was six, I woke up early Saturday morning to reruns of *The New Adventures of Captain Planet*, uncomfortably aware that climate change was real and that this was a mythical superhero who couldn't actually save the planet. When I was thirteen, I began to follow the news, witnessing story after story about horrible mass shootings and wishing there were characters like Batman or Superman to stop the bloodshed. In my early teen years, I also began to notice the complexity of dealing with poverty in America, signs of which were all over my hometown of Atlanta, from boarded-up buildings to panhandlers at every corner. At that moment I had to ask: Where is the real world Robin Hood? Now, at 18, I've come to understand that voting is the solution to all of those questions. Voting makes us all the superheroes of our dreams.

When you vote for candidates that support meaningful environmental legislation, such as the Kyoto Protocol and The Paris Agreement, you are channeling Captain Planet's Planeteers. The Planeteers are youth from around the globe who have powers to fight environmental destruction. When they alone could not succeed, they summoned someone to represent their combined powers—Captain Planet. You and I alone cannot stop big issues, such as poaching and carbon emissions, but our votes can through the people we elect. Elected officials can put forward sanctions, regulate industries, and prohibit products that contain environmentally damaging substances; their influence is far greater than the impact of an

individual, everyday American. This is no more true than in the state where I go to school—North Carolina. Pat McCrory, the current governor, has been accused of favoring his former employer, Duke Energy, the company that caused the third-largest coal-ash spill in American history. His administration is one of many state governments that have opposed environmental regulation in favor of big business. This election day, the people of North Carolina can “let [their] powers combine” to protect our environment simply by voting for McCrory's opponent Roy Cooper.

When you vote for candidates who support gun control and rational policies to reduce crime, you tap into a little part of your inner Batman and Superman. Although none of us can fly or have an arsenal of high-tech crime-fighting tools, we do have something that is equally as potent: voting for candidates who, like Hillary Clinton, believe that reasonable gun control should be a priority. Superheroes won't stop the next mass shooting—it's you and I who go to the polls November 8th and vote for candidates who support reasonable gun control. Americans are unsatisfied with the state of gun violence in this country, so why are we waiting for a superhero to stop the carnage?

Poverty is a complicated and menacing archenemy for even a superhero. But there are weapons that can help stop this beast. When you vote for candidates who support closing tax loopholes and eliminating deductions that benefit the rich, you bring out your inner Robin Hood. Donald Trump's success can be partly attributed to the

anger of America's white rural poor, who feel abandoned by the current political establishment. They believe poor urban Americans, in particular people of color, receive too much government and media attention, as well as resources.

Poverty and issues over race have become deeply intertwined in politics, making it an uncomfortable problem to discuss, and an even more overwhelming to solve. Politicians must be reminded that poverty is a problem that affects all Americans—regardless of their race or where they live in our nation. When millions of our citizens are in poverty, this country has a moral obligation to support them. By voting for candidates who wholeheartedly support early childhood education, elimination of food deserts, and social support services, we can all be the superheroes who eliminate poverty from the richest nation on earth.

Whatever political issue you are most passionate about, whatever your party affiliation, whatever your age, your race, your gender identity or your sexual orientation, know that you have the superpower to create change. Yessenia Funes, in her article, “5 Reasons to Vote Even When You Hate Everything on the Ballot,” correctly pointed out that especially in this election the “People who vote the least have the most to lose this election.” These people should not be waiting for some mythical superhero to save them. They already have that power by voting. Unfortunately—in this world of injustice—not everyone has the right to be a superhero. Yessenia reminds us to “consider all the people who have an important opinion but can't vote.” So, if you have the power to vote, utilize it, and be the superhero that many of us cannot.

Postscript: The election did not, in fact, change my opinion. It only strengthened the ideas I discussed. The fact that

Clinton won by 2.5 million votes proves that voting should make a difference, but that our system is broken enough for Trump to win and lose the popular vote. I also believe that not voting is a major problem. I heard a lot of people say, “Well, my district is already gonna go for Trump so why vote?” That is the mindset that made Clinton lose states like Wisconsin and North Carolina.

# With Great Asians Comes Great Responsibility

By Tyler Kim, grade 11

About two months ago my mother asked me who I would vote for in the 2016 election; I told her I just wouldn't vote. This response disappointed her. When I told her this, I had my reasons for my answer, but I didn't want to trap myself in a conversation about politics with my mother. I had better things to do. But now, two months later, I read an article called "5 Reasons to Vote Even When You Hate Everything on the Ballot," by Yessenia Funes, which gave me a perfect chance to show that I wasn't being cowardly or passive, but trying to bring attention to the real responsibility of American citizens.

Everyone is talking about how this is one of the most influential elections in American history, but now due to all the pointless drama, it's just another bad reality TV show. And just like any bad reality TV show, fanatics of the show seem to have even less common sense than the actors, and end up treating the election as if Kim and Kanye were getting a divorce. These bandwagoners have to turn toward social media for a purpose in life, and that's where the problem is. Media doesn't focus on what everyone needs; it only cares about the hollow shells that can't form their own opinions because they are the people with money and power.

The upper class doesn't care about the rest of society, which means the media doesn't either since the rest of society doesn't have money. When the media is set up to pander to the strong, the real issues of life, such as moral obligations towards immigrants that come here in search of a better life, are hidden under

a tarp. Clearly the upper class has never heard Uncle Ben's famous last words to Peter Parker: "With great power, comes great responsibility." The upper class possesses great power, but they fail their true responsibility—creating a unified society that cares about what lies and who lives on the margins. This might be a harsh assessment of the advocates for voting, so let's see if Funes can convince me otherwise.

In her article, "5 Reasons to Vote Even When You Hate Everything on the Ballot," Funes argues that we should vote because our opinions matter. But that's not always true. Let's take a look at how democracy works in America. The overarching idea of democracy is consent of the governed. This basically translates to majority rule. This means that if I voted and the candidate I voted for lost, then my opinion actually didn't matter. My voice was snuffed out by the majority. But when a presidential candidate wins the electoral vote, yet loses the popular vote—which has only happened four times in American history—"democracy" throws away the majority's preference.

That's the society we live in. A world where greed and money overpower the honest and the weak. Look at all the poor neighborhoods full of Black families. Look at all the Syrian refugees that need our help. And look at me—a scrawny Korean-American nerd. All of these people on the margins, waking up every morning, feeling choked by the oppressors who thrive off of this flawed society. The people who nag me for not wanting to vote—the media, the

overly political girl at school, and even sometimes parents. Sure, they may acknowledge that people suffer, but they will never truly understand it.

They will never understand what it's like to be put to a higher standard, even when failure is inevitable. They will never understand what it's like to be looked at as Asian in white society, and white in Asian society. They will never understand what it's like walking into a school full of blonde white girls who wear an anagram on their overly priced jacket with their yoga pants and Uggs, who honestly all look the same, and who will never understand who I am because they can't see anything past their safe little world. What they see are small issues like voting, because, like I said, they need the media for a sense of meaning, and media doesn't show them what my meaning in life looks like.

When people say that it's a responsibility to vote, they are neglecting the real responsibilities they have—and that's fixing this damaged society we live in. If you asked me how we could fix our society, my answer would honestly be “we can't.” Sure, maybe things like a segregated world or misogynistic ideologies can change, but evils such as bigotry will never die. Even though that's the hard truth, it doesn't mean that nothing should be done.

One day this fall, I went to an interminority dialogue/performance/poetry slam at an art gallery located in downtown St. Louis. The event was intended to create a bond between Black and Asian communities, since they don't interact much. The sound of Jason Chu and Corey Black's lyrics and verses echoed throughout the small building. They pierced my ears and made their way into my mind. Listening to those performances gave me a sense of power, even more powerful than if the candidate

I voted for won the election. Even though I knew that outside of that art gallery racism still continued to blight the world we live in, even though I knew the very next morning I would have to go to school and look at the very thing I hate most in the eyes, and yes, even though I knew, as the very talented rapper, Jason Chu put it: “bad men win, and even good men die,” I still felt strong that night. It made me feel like I could just snap my fingers, and, in an instance, Meacham Park wouldn't be seen as “the bad part of Kirkwood.” Michael Brown would still be eating dinner with his family. And my feeling of loneliness at school would be gone.

The part of Jason Chu's verse that I quoted might sound bleak, but when I hear the rest of it—“but one small spark can light the whole night, so one small soul can fight the good fight”—I can tell he felt the same strength I did. So sure Funes, if you want to wait in line at the polls go ahead, but this small spark is going to take the fight elsewhere.

Postscript: The results of the election did not change my mind at all. When people went to vote that night they didn't change anything about the country. As I previously said in my essay, people already had a skewed perspective on the election (my Kim and Kanye analogy). Nothing is going to change with Trump being president, and as comedian Bill Burr once said in an interview with Conan O'Brien: “If you liked Obama at all, did he call you in the last eight years? Did he ever put a sandwich on your table? You do that, you're going to keep doing that, you're going to be fine.” While this response is super funny, it also carries a lot of truth. Trump becoming president won't do anything for the issues I raised in my essay, and it'd be the same if Hillary won as well.

## A Vote for the Voiceless

By Norbu Sonam, grade 11

My father escaped from Tibet after it was invaded by China in 1950. Since the invasion of Tibet, millions of Tibetans have been killed, thousands have been imprisoned, and countless monasteries have been destroyed. The physical destruction of Tibet was a great dehumanization, but the even greater contributors to the degradation of Tibetan citizens was the loss of their freedom to use voice and to practice their religion. My father, like many others, escaped from Tibet because he could not bear to keep living that way. He faced hardships none of us in the United States can imagine in order to obtain these basic rights.

My father was fifteen years old when he understood the risks of escaping Tibet. He witnessed people being publicly humiliated for raising their voices against Chinese authority, and heard gruesome stories of families who had been forced to pay for the Chinese army's guns and bullets that were used to kill their fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters. My father faced these risks head-on and successfully crossed the Tibet-Nepal border. The harsh climate of the area was one of many risks, but more than anything, the outlying fear was being caught. If you were caught by the Chinese border patrol, you would be imprisoned and tortured for life. The possibility of death was also a tremendous danger. But death was, in fact, an easier way out because it was instant and you wouldn't have to suffer.

My father's journey was a success. Without a hitch, he made it across the border, through Nepal, and eventually

to India, where he obtained refugee status. He was able to immigrate to the United States through his father, who had escaped Tibet when my father was only eight months old. In sharing his story, my father emphasized that his experience was nothing compared to the hardships of other Tibetans looking to regain their freedom. It was pure luck that geography was on his side. He did not have to do much traveling by foot. Others faced longer journeys, which often included hiking through torturous areas and mountainous territory. In many instances, this resulted in starvation and frostbite. Keep in mind, Tibet has an unforgiving arctic climate.

My father's intentions were clear from the beginning: he wanted to have the same basic rights that he and every other person deserved. America was the best place for him to achieve that. To this day, he is fascinated by the rights of American citizens. My father strongly disagrees with the opinions of Rush Limbaugh, yet he cannot help but listen to him. He is enthralled by the fact that Rush Limbaugh is allowed to speak his mind as freely as he does. Limbaugh does not hold back his stance, and he is not fearful of the backlash his words may cause. The fact that Limbaugh and any other American can say what's on their minds, is astonishing to my father. He appreciates the freedoms that I, and many other Americans, take for granted—basic rights we didn't have to fight for during our lifetime.

Voting is one of the most integral rights that we take for granted. But for people like my father, that will never

be the case because he will always remember what he went through to get that right. With respect to people like my father, and to American soldiers who fought for this right, everyone should vote this upcoming election. Yessenia Funes says in “5 Reasons to Vote Even When You Hate Everything on the Ballot,” to “consider all the people who have an important opinion but can’t vote.” The people who “can’t vote” are not just people with busy work schedules or people with criminal records. These people include the 1.36 billion Chinese citizens under communist rule who can’t vote. Just because we, as American citizens, have this right does not mean everyone else does, and to squander the opportunity is not only disrespectful to those who do not have this right, but also to those who are fighting for the right to vote at this very moment. Your vote not only voices your opinion. It is also a voice—a shout-out—for the millions of voiceless people around the globe who would give anything, even risk their lives, to choose their leaders, to speak freely, and to feel like they matter.

Postscript: My essay was based on the right to vote in a global sense. It was about how people fight and risk their own lives for the rights that we have and often take for granted. And considering that people around the world still have to do that, my opinion still holds that anybody who is eligible should use their vote.