

WRITING LESSON

Justice For All



In the YES! Magazine article **I Can't Breathe Until Everyone Can Breathe**, social entrepreneur **Gerald Mitchell** wrestles with the unjust deaths of so many unarmed Black Americans by police. He takes an honest look at himself to see how he's part of the problem, and commits to joining others in building a better world.

Students will use Gerald Mitchell's article to write about what treating people fairly and humanely looks like to them.

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I Can't Breathe Until Everyone Can Breathe

Gerald Mitchell feels that the root of the mistreatment and tragic deaths of unarmed Black people is not just racist police practices. The cause also stems from inhumane, exploitative societal practices, like shopping at places that don't pay their workers enough to support their families, that all of us—consciously or not— participate in and support every day.



A Milwaukie Black Lives Matter march. Photo by Light Brigade.

By Gerald Mitchell

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ON THE NIGHT WE LEARNED THAT DANIEL PANTALEO, THE COP WHO KILLED ERIC GARNER, WOULDN'T EVEN FACE TRIAL, I was sitting on my bed trying to be rational about the decision when my friend texted me:

“It is because he refused to be dehumanized by complying with their stop and frisk that he died.

And it hit me. I broke down.

I broke down because I knew that it would be so easy for me to meet the same fate. My mother taught me to have pride and stand up for my humanity. Yet my mother also taught me how to survive. And somehow those two—survival and my humanity—aren't always compatible.

Needing some air, I decided to take a walk.

Half a block from my door, I ended up walking past two policemen on the corner in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. The latent Huey Newton side of me started bubbling up, and rage filled my body.

All I could think of at the moment was: This can't be life.

The second thing that came to mind was: It's time to stop pulling punches.

All my life, I've skirted around the reasoning for what I do, both personally and professionally. I've made my story palatable for certain audiences that may be uncomfortable with my truth.

I'd tell people that I changed my life, ditched my Greenwich Village apartment and quit my high-paying finance job to start SWICH, which helps New Yorkers support restaurants that are tasty, healthy, and sustainable. I did it because another friend, who owned a sandwich shop (not coincidentally called S'WICH), closed up shop because customers didn't want to pay \$10 for a sandwich with top-quality ingredients served by a person who was being paid fairly...

...Or maybe it was because I, as an investor who used other people's money to invest in urban small businesses like my friend's, didn't use my own money to do the same. In fact, most of my "local spending" was at my neighborhood bars.

It would be understandable to come to the conclusion that I was just some foodie who felt hypocritical because I didn't eat artisanal sandwiches.

That's my fault. It's time set the record straight. You might not like what I'm about to say, because it's challenging. It's challenging for all of us. But we're on the same side.

The real truth behind why I am so passionate that we need to put our money where our mouths are?

It's because of injustices like Eric Garner's death. It's because of situations like Ferguson.

It's because of John Crawford III (who was killed by police inside an Ohio Wal-Mart); Jordan Baker (who was killed by an off-duty cop in a Houston mall parking lot last January; this week, a grand jury cleared the officer); Dontre Hamilton (who was mentally ill and fatally shot

by a cop in Milwaukee); Romain Brisbon (who was unarmed when Phoenix police killed him earlier this month), Tamir Rice (who, at 12 years old, was killed by Cleveland police last month); and numerous others like them who have had their lives cut short for reasons that are nebulous at best and nefarious at worst.

**We are in the
exploitation
business...
and business is
booming.**

It's because I, like many, talked a lot about the injustices of the world, often settling in the comfortable place of finding someone else to blame. And I have come to realize that I am both part of the problem, and, as a result, part of the solution.

It's because I don't want blood on my hands.

It's because I want to join with others to find a way to put an end to all of this (and in case it wasn't obvious, shooting policeman is not the answer—though neither is silence).

It's because, as Fannie Lou Hamer said: "Nobody's free until everybody's free."

Nobody's free

Now the uncomfortable part.

Believe it or not, many of us (most of us?) are complicit in creating the conditions for these injustices to take place. We depend on a system that requires poor people to be poor, both domestically and globally, so that we can get what we want cheap. It's time to face facts. That's how our respective lifestyles are possible. And the only way to maintain that lifestyle is by keeping these poor folks out of sight, out of mind, and in their lane so that they don't threaten those of us who are not poor—our bodies, our property, our consciences.

We are in the exploitation business...and business is booming.

Is it any surprise, then, given how

dependent we are on this structure, that the Eric Garner and Michael Browns and, by residual effect, myself, continue to suffer for it?

The police, like the military, are, in many ways, just carrying out our marching orders. Racism is an element that adds a lethal injection to a situation that is already unconscionable.

That doesn't let police off the hook for their behavior. To the contrary, to fulfill the promise of #ThisStopsToday, to show that #BlackLivesMatter, we all need to stop treating people like shit and start treating people better... like humans.

The first step, as any addict will tell you, is acknowledging we've got a problem. What's our problem? We—you and me—are in the exploitation business...and business is booming.

ex·ploi·ta·tion
ek sploi t SH()n/
noun

i. the action or fact of treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work.

We can start acknowledging our problem by realizing that there is always an actual human being on the other side of our actions; that no matter how good a person we think we are, we all make choices daily that result in the exploitation of others.

That hamburger served to you by someone making sub-minimum wage? Exploitative. That mutual fund you invest in that has holdings of companies that use prison labor? Exploitative. That marketing job you have peddling unhealthy products? Exploitative. This MacBook Air I'm typing this on? Exploitative.

But those imperfections don't, in themselves, make you or me bad people.

Perfectly navigating this world while avoiding exploiting others is impossible. Yet that doesn't mean we throw up our hands and do nothing. Working toward "better"—reducing harm and maximizing positivity—is possible. But it requires seeking out the knowledge, not sweeping information under the rug and pretending like it doesn't exist so we can feel better about ourselves and avoid thinking about our choices and changing our actions.

What does better mean?

I can't help shake the feeling that what we need is a Montgomery Bus Boycott, updated for the 21st century.

I don't fool myself. Projects like SWICH alone aren't going to change much. Food? Spending? NYC? I can understand why you might find that underwhelming.

But that was never really my goal when I started my personal and professional journey to do better. While it is rewarding to help people choose healthier, more sustainable places to eat, that is just a step toward a larger purpose of helping influence our collective consciousness, of how we think about ourselves and our roles in the communities we are a part of; to be increasingly cognizant of our individual impact on others with the choices we make; to shift those choices from those that negatively impact others to those that positively impact all of us.

Basically...to stop exploiting people in every way, as best we can. That is better.

We don't have a lack of solutions. We have a lack of will. If our grandmas, fathers, aunts, and uncles could do what they did in the 1960s, surely we can refrain from feeding the exploitative beast that ends up biting us in the ass in the end anyways. Surely we can do better than those who we are protesting against.

Until that mindset changes, there will always be people, like Eric Garner—like me—getting their asses kicked. The only question is who...and what "justification" will be used to dehumanize them/us.

A better solution

Our goal should never be to just not be the ones getting our asses kicked (or worse, to be the ones administering the ass-kicking). It should be to stop the ass-kicking altogether.

MLK, Frantz Fanon, Ayi Kwei Armah, Angela Davis, Gandhi, Mandela, Audre Lorde, the Dalai Lama: They all envision(ed) a world that was fundamentally different than ours is today; where a better world doesn't mean just gaining access and assuming power to repeat the same mistakes as those who previously held power over you. Instead it means rejecting the desire to exploit others in order to build something that works for everyone.

This is as much practical as it is dreamy. Pursuing universal justice for all undoubtedly raises the likelihood of gaining justice for Black people in particular.

Further, if you were with tens of thousands of other people at the Millions March New York City demonstration on December 13, I'm sure you heard calls to "Shut It Down," meaning make life unworkable in order to achieve justice. There are lots of ways of making that a reality. But I can't help shake the feeling that what we need is a Montgomery Bus Boycott (which, by the way, lasted 381 days), updated for the 21st century. What better way to "Shut It Down" than to refrain, en masse, from feeding the very system we're protesting against?

The late Maya Angelou said: "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." When it comes to injustices like those we saw in Ferguson, we're all part of the problem—and the solution.

Contrary to what some may believe, now is not the time to stop calling for justice because we've gone too far. Now is the time to turn it up because we haven't gone far enough. We can vote for a better world, free of exploitation, with our money as well as our marches, and build strength in our communities. Every day. In the process, we serve as an example of what is possible and even gain leverage to force people to treat us better, instead of asking from a place of "weakness" where we are dependent on the very people and embedded in the very system that treat us unfairly.

I can almost guarantee you that this new just world is much better than the current one we're struggling with. Not just for those who

are being oppressed, but for everyone, you included. It's better than a flat screen or an expensive handbag. It's better than a trip to an all-inclusive resort or a cronut. Can't buy me love, right?

The late Maya Angelou said: "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

The easy interpretation is a passive one—that we can wait around to be randomly enlightened before we do better. But the way I read this is that we must be doggedly proactive to learn more about what we do and what impact we have—and thus "know better."

The great thing about accepting our role in contributing to what we are fighting against, is that we regain our agency, our power to bring about change. Even more encouraging is that, unlike politics, it doesn't even take a majority of us to do so. We, who care, can join in building a new world with liberty and justice for all.

Just know that whatever, and in fact everything, you do is an act in favor of justice... or not. You certainly don't have to join me in my journey, though I'd love the company. But regardless, if you care, burying your head in the sand to avoid looking in the mirror ain't gonna cut it anymore.

This is how we create a better world—together.

Part 2: The Writing Prompt

In this story, author and entrepreneur Gerald Mitchell wrestles with the unjust deaths of so many unarmed Black Americans by police. He takes an honest look at himself to see how he's part of the problem. Like Gerald Mitchell, dig deep to identify and explain how you personally can treat people more justly. Describe what treating people fairly and humanely looks like to you. How might your actions make a difference where you live (school and community)? In greater society?

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:

copy lesson article url here!

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).

	4	3	2	1
Focus on topic	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.
Organization	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.
Originality and strength of ideas	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.
Evidence and/or reasoning	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.
Command of grammar and conventions	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.
Voice	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.

Stay Tuned to Change the World

By Cate Landry, Grade 8

We have all done it. You sit down on the couch, turn on the news. You nervously watch as a news anchor reports another brutal story on police brutality. You watch until you can't take it anymore. You quickly turn it off and think it's better to just ignore the injustices. You think that if you ignore them, they'll go away. Until two years ago, I thought that was completely okay. I thought that if I didn't know about the inhumanities in our world, they didn't exist. But then I went through an experience that led me to the truth: ignorance does not resolve issues. Action, not ignorance, will be the solution.

Two years ago, I participated in a school project that changed my life—and the world. Forty of my classmates and I educated ourselves about global issues, like poverty and the barriers to education that leave many girls around the world without the rights they deserve. Did you know that 66 million girls globally do not have the opportunity to attend school? That's 66 million lives that don't have a bright future.

We reached out to our local community and educated others about this global injustice. We started with small steps, organizing bake sales, making t-shirts, and hosting a film screening of the award-winning documentary, *Girl Rising*. Realizing that education is what these girls needed, we raised over \$4,000, which we used to sponsor the tuition and school supplies for four girls from Kenya. The experience was overwhelmingly humbling. I was only a twelve-year-old girl at the time, but I felt that I had made a difference in overcoming a global injustice. I felt a sense of empowerment—that I could change the world. It was in that moment I realized ignorance is not the way to get rid of a problem; in fact, it's not helping at all.

From then on I made a promise to myself. I promised that I would never turn off the TV again. Well, not literally. But I did promise

myself to never again think that it is okay to be ignorant, to never again believe that what I don't know won't hurt me. Recognizing the problem is the first step to resolving an issue. But don't stop there. What else can we do? Let's be realistic here. One person can't send 66 million girls to school. So let's start with the small stuff.

Educate yourself on the issues of the world. Become an expert on the problem, and then activate your power to create change. Nothing is going to change if you wait for it. Get involved in your community and support organizations that are already making a difference with these causes—or start your own. Educate others. Awareness and education will spread like wildfire. The faster we take these steps to get involved, the faster we will change the world and become a more just society.

Not only did the *Girl Rising* project change the lives of four girls in Kenya, it also changed the lives of people in my community here in Boulder, Colorado. People from all over the city attended the film screening. Everyone wanted to support the cause and help make a change in the world. Even my friend's little brother donated some of his allowance to the fund after seeing the film. Together, we had made a difference and all it took was a little effort and energy.

So let's start putting in that extra effort. Let's start educating ourselves and others. Let's start teaching people that we are the ones who have to build our own future. It's easier now than ever before. The use of technology to communicate globally is rapidly growing, and our opportunities to help change the world are increasing. There are endless possibilities out there—all at our fingertips. If we take these actions, step-by-step, our world will become a better place. And trust me, once we start taking these actions nothing will stop us.

Part 5: Sample Essays

(Cate Landry Essay Continued)

Next time you sit down on the couch after a long day to flip through the news, I encourage you to keep watching. Remember that there are inhumanities all around us and ignoring them won't solve the world's problems. Don't change the channel, because ignorance is not the path to justice; what we don't know will hurt us. Keep the TV on to raise your awareness and change the world. Keep the TV on and think of small steps you can make to create a future that is more just and humane. A future that is bright.

A Deafening Silence

By Amani Lazarus, Grade 8

I walked into my parents' room, and then I heard screams. I let out a sigh of relief when I realized the screams were coming from the phone in my father's hand. My parents were both so captivated by the action on the small screen that my dad didn't notice me crawl up behind his shoulder and peek in on the action. On the screen I saw a large black male being held down by two white policemen. While the races of the people didn't matter at the time, the gunshot that followed did. The policemen had killed the black man, even though they had full control of the situation.

I walked out of the room and thought nothing of it until three days later, when the same thing happened to a different man. Then again. And again. And again. And I realized that race was beginning to matter. In each case it was a black man on the bottom and a white man on the top. Then it was a black woman under a white man. Then it was a black boy under a white man. And that was when I realized, this would not stop. Not until we, as a nation, learned to treat people with respect, no matter the race.

In the essay, "I Can't Breathe Until Everyone Can Breathe," Gerald Mitchell claims we need to "turn things up" to stop these injustices. I agree. We have been silent too long. We need to increase the volume. We need to treat all people, regardless of race, with respect—and respect requires voice.

When I thought of treating others with respect, I thought it simply meant to follow the golden rule—treat others as you would like to be treated—when in reality, it was so much more than that. It also meant addressing the moments where I did not act. It meant addressing the bullying that I walked past as I bit my lip, the homeless man that I distrusted and shied away from with a grimace, the

toy that I just couldn't find within myself to share with my little sister, Sanaia. Every act of unkindness—big and small—was an injustice. That is when I realized that the second we pass off these everyday acts of injustice as no big deal, it becomes much easier to pass off the bigger ones. Thinking "this is okay" is embedded within us. It is the cause of our deafening silence. And in these times, our voices matter most.

While the news stories I'd seen involved police officers, I realized injustice is much larger than a police problem. It's a human problem. It's all of us. It is our innate, petty prejudice. The problem is rooted in our minds from the time we first learned to comprehend the world around us. We need to realize that we have reached the climax of the situation. As with any story, after the climax, there must come a resolution.

The dead are already silent, but their voices, through their stories, can still be heard. I want to be their voice, and give them the justice they deserved. The rights that they deserved. The peace that they deserved. But I am one. And I simply can't do it alone. If the problem rests within us all, then the solution must rest there too.

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "In the end, we will not remember the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." We can't stand by and be silent while others scream in pain. We all must learn to be empathetic. Sympathetic. Compassionate. Loving. Kind. As the words get shorter, so does the distance between us and them. It starts in our everyday lives. Down to the way we treat our siblings within our house to the way we treat our friends, and strangers, outside of it. And until I am older and my platform is bigger that is where I will start.

Black Girl, White Space

By Naomi Blair, Grade 11

I am black. I know it, and people around me know it. I know they do because when I walked into my AP Psychology class for the very first time, everyone looked at me as if I was a cat in the midst of a field full of lions. The girl in the pink, oversized sweatshirt was talking to her friend, but she stole a glance my way and ruffled her nose. The guy two seats behind her squinted his eyes at me, but only for a second. Another boy a row away from him gave me a quick look over and then started talking to the guy next to me. I could practically hear their words, “What is she doing in this class?” Their eyes told me that I didn’t belong in an advanced placement course. Of course not. I am black. I was the triangle block trying to fit in a square space.

Unfortunately, stereotyping isn’t an isolated incident. This isn’t the only time I have been stereotyped. And, I am not the only one who has fallen victim to this behavior. Most, if not all, of my black friends complain of the racism we experience in our school. One day, as we talked about our groups of friends, Abi, a black friend of mine, told me in a fit of rage that she wasn’t “black enough for her black friends, and not white enough for her white friends.” I agreed and decided to do something about it.

To quote Gerald Mitchell, author of “I Can’t Breathe Until Everyone Can Breathe,” “[we can realize] that there is always an actual human being on the other side of our actions.” I wondered how I could get the people at my school and in my community to be aware of the consequences of racism, whether their actions be conscious or unconscious. In November of this year, I announced to fellow staffers of my school newspaper, *The Kirkwood Call*, that I wanted to do a social experiment. This experiment, I hoped, would shed light on the conscious and unconscious racism happening, not only in my school, but in my community

as a whole. I planned to videotape scenarios of students socializing in classrooms, similar to the ones I go through, to show my community the discrimination that takes place every day in plain sight.

Many people at my school, though they are reluctant to admit it, stereotype, especially towards black people. I see Mrs. Fredrickson, a white teacher, who when told of a student mishap assumes that a black student caused it. I see Marissa, a white student in the lunchroom, talking about black people as if they were invisible, even though they are sitting at the table next to her. One of my white friends once told me I was white because of my academic standing. Another, who was black, agreed and told me that I was an Oreo: black on the outside, white on the inside. They thought that because I am smart, I couldn’t possibly be black. They even tried to rationalize it. My friend, Miranda said, “You’re not really black.” I narrowed my eyes, rammed my arm in front of their faces, and said, “Of course not. If you rub hard enough on my forearm, you can see my real white skin underneath.”

What I want to do is get people to stop stereotyping, whether they are aware of their racism or not. I am already starting to bring about this consciousness with my social experiment. I invited a group of black and white students to participate in this experiment and talk about their experiences with racism. They pointed out injustices, such as an administrator asking a study group of black students to leave the library while a study group of white students were allowed to stay. The white group of students that came to my experiment said they wanted to change the way black people are treated by white students and teachers. When I asked them how they would transform this perception, no one had an answer. After a few

Part 5: Sample Essays

(Naomi Blair Essay Continued)

uncomfortably quiet pauses, I asked them what they thought injustice looks like. They timidly listed generic answers: not treating someone fairly, and discriminating based on skin color, sexuality, and gender. I then asked them what injustice specifically looked like in our school. One girl's face turned beet red and her lips were pursed as she frantically described a situation in which she saw a white teacher ignore a black student while having her full attention on a white student. I expressed my utter disbelief with an "Are you kidding me?" and asked even more students if they encountered instances like these. They all said yes.

Treating people fairly and humanely by trying to not dwell on stereotypes and teaching others to do the same is an important step to eliminate racism. Fairness looks like treating every person the same, not just in relation to race, but also to gender and sexuality. When I walk into the AP Psychology class, people should look at me because my outfit is just that cute, or because I have a milk moustache from that morning's breakfast, not because of the color of my skin. Justice looks like not assuming that because I am black, I am supposed to be loud, prone to fights, uneducated, vulgar, and live in poverty. A white girl once told me, "You're not like how I imagined. You're not ghetto at all."

Stereotyping is racism. I plan to get my peers and teachers to stop judging people by their skin color. I plan to talk to and teach my peers why discrimination is unacceptable, and will inspire my friends to do the same. Through my social experiment, I hope to spotlight the discrimination that is happening right under their noses, in plain sight. The video, which will be showcased on The Kirkwood Call's website, will undeniably show my classmates what discrimination looks like Kirkwood style.

I anticipate they will join me to change our school—and our society—for the better. Though we will be a small group at first, we will be mighty.

One day, a student like me will be able to walk into an advanced course and feel that she belongs simply because she is smart and wants to learn.

Love: Free of Fear and Judgement

By Karen Jordan, Grade 12

Who we are, where we grow up, what we look like, even our names are all factors in the tangled clutter of how and where we fit into society. Fortunately, we have done away with, for the most part, caste systems and other unfair segregation hierarchies. However, we have not even begun to address the biases we still embrace for each other.

Instead of owning up to these unrealistic standards we place on the people around us, we suppress them while exploitative subliminal messages placed throughout the environment bore their way into our treatment, or mistreatment, of others. It seems as though we prefer to passively slam our equals down every chance we get. Why are we acting this way towards one another? This nasty movement of hatred and rebellion is transforming from crude jokes and callous bashes from teenagers and TV shows to a society where every human must fend for themselves in this apparently unforgiving world.

I, for one, have not been the most cooperative in creating a safe and respectful environment for those around me to enjoy the real virtues of life. I have made crude jokes and comments, and have smoked pot—among other drugs—leading me to act selfishly and unjustly towards others, as well as outwardly bashing our government and America on social media. I paid no attention to how my actions might be affecting my country, let alone my own community. I didn't give anyone a chance, especially myself at possibly being someone great one day. In my mind, the world, as well as the people who live on this seemingly miserable planet, was already doomed for mass obliteration. I gave up. In doing so, I disassociated myself from everything, continuing to suffer apathetically in a society that propelled me further and further into a

dark, depressing oblivion.

After the hammer came down on my own life in the form of a wilderness treatment program and a therapeutic boarding school, I saw a clear picture of what it might look like for this figurative hammer to come down on our society making everyone more aware of their unpleasant surroundings. I stopped laughing at mean-spirited shows including adult animated sitcoms and became unamused with the arbitrary songs playing on our radio stations about “throwing our hands in the air,” which I believe promotes ignorance. Instead, I started paying attention to the substance of this planet and everything that comes with it. The good, the bad, and the ugly. I started thinking for myself and almost immediately felt better being in my own skin which was something I felt I was not allowed to do during such a shameful time in my life. If we allowed for change to take place, judgments aside, we might actually really enjoy what this new world might bring.

Almost every action we commit on a daily basis affects others and the majority of us purposely leave that out of our thought processes. If I don't think about the pig that was immorally butchered while hanging upside down from a rusty hook, then I can take a moment to enjoy this delicious applewood smoked bacon. If I ignore the fact that the homeless are more than just drug addicts, then I won't feel so guilty about not giving them a mere 50 cents out of my wallet. If I use a magnifying glass on my world, then I can forget about the injustices being committed outside of this small town I live in.

These limited thoughts are exactly what's wrong with this culture. Because of our lack of empathy and our want for momentary indulgences we miss out on perspective which can be found all throughout this planet. It's not

Part 5: Sample Essays

(Karen Jordan Essay Continued)

just us who can help the world, but matters like global warming, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, public shooting and killing of unarmed black people, and extraordinary space discoveries that can help us bridge the gap between indifference and understanding in our own worlds. As humans, we learn by visually observing the atmosphere that surrounds us and using what we've seen all throughout our own personal lives. We can look at these vast mistakes and address them by promising to do better within our own community. If we make a valiant effort towards world enlightenment, then maybe we can live in an environment that fosters peace, free of war and terror.

We need to promote mindfulness, and transcend to the simplest actions of kindness and respect in order to thrive in this superficial, hate-filled world. There are many things humans don't have the ability to see. One of these is potential. It seems as though we have taken our tokens of hope and optimism and thrown them on the floor, shattering any chance they had to guide us through life. Our world may seem miserable and filled with animosity but in reality we carry so much potential. All we need to do is stay conscious and be tolerant toward anything—and anyone—we may encounter on this expedition. This is one of the many definitions of love.

Love freely what you love. This is our world and nobody else's.

Compassionate Communities: Where Mindfulness Starts, Injustice Ends

By Elizabeth Schmidt, Kent State University

After I read “I Can’t Breathe Until Everyone Can Breathe,” I heard on NPR that there was a mass shooting in Roseburg, Oregon, killing or injuring 16 students and a teacher. I stopped for a second, took a breath, and started my homework.

The disregard for others that Mitchell identifies as the source of prejudice and exploitation in “I Can’t Breathe Until Everyone Can Breathe” rears its head with enmity in cases like the Oregon shooting, but more often it’s a beast that kills with a casual eye towards injustice and a shrug of dismissal. Although it is not always clear how, we all contribute to that dismissal. I gave the beast the opportunity to strike when I turned the radio off and continued my daily business like nothing had happened. My insecurities encouraged this brush-off when I heard a friend say that lax gun control isn’t a significant factor in shootings. I held my tongue in disagreement because I was afraid to offend him, plus I didn’t have any concrete evidence to destroy his argument. The end of injustice starts with ending our tolerance to it, by caring more about what happens to other people than our personal fears. “Realizing that there is always an actual human being on the other side of our actions,” as Mitchell advocates for, is easier said than done, but if we are the perpetrators of injustice, then we are the ones with the power to stop it.

In the case of violent shootings, our first step should be to grieve. J.I. Cruz, a Frederick Douglas Scholar at American University and 2015 Global Citizen Year Fellow, encourages us to take a moment of silence. He writes in “On Oregon and On Feeling,” “Maybe, in those small moments of silence [that] allow us to feel, we will understand...To feel, if only for one

second, may help us [be] more connected, and maybe that will make all the difference.”

If we are going to treat each other justly, we must regain the depth in our feelings. That means embracing loss and using our anger to speak out against injustice. It also means being present to the richness we have available to us: the smell after rain, the sound of children’s chatter at the park, the warm relief of coming home to the embrace of a loved one. We can’t preserve others’ humanity when we’re losing our own by living on autopilot.

If we recognize the beauty around us, we will also recognize the sting when that beauty is threatened. If we get our eyes out of our devices and into the eyes of our family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, teachers, even strangers... If we come out of autopilot for just a moment to be a little more alive, we can’t help but connect to others; when we feel connected to the rest of the world, we take responsibility for it.

For me, taking responsibility means confronting situations that feel unjust. It means paying a couple extra dollars for locally grown organic products at Kent Natural Foods Co-op and the Countryside Conservancy Farmers’ Market, or from farmers with fair labor practices, rather than the supermarket. Taking responsibility means stopping when I’ve wronged someone and making amends. It means putting aside stereotypes that I unconsciously impose on others; it means recognizing individuality. It means listening to others with respect and attention and responding with kindness and sensitivity.

Saying these are the ‘right things to do’ isn’t enough to make them happen. Compassionate acts will happen when we’re invested in the world we’re creating and recognize that they’re

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necessary for building communities where people can support themselves and each other, where healthy food and fresh air are available for everyone. They must be done so that people aren't harmed by systems our money supports or by messages we propagate; everyone has the chance to thrive. Everyone has something to contribute if he or she is given a chance. Speaking up against injustice must be done to hold everyone accountable for spreading kind, or at least truthful, ideas. I want to be a part of these actions because they're the building materials for the type of world that I want to live in.

Perhaps I overestimate the impacts of my individual actions, but, at the very least, living connectedly may allow people around me to live with more vitality or may help them see their own power and value. Maybe those actions can entice others to act similarly—even change the mind of whoever might be the next shooter. If we all live with awareness of our impacts and drive our actions with feeling, maybe we can stop trying to right injustice with justice and instead prevent it with compassion.