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WRITING LESSON
STANDING UP FOR OUR NEIGHBORS

In the YES! Magazine article, "What Japanese Internment Taught Us About Standing Up for Our Neighbors," YES! Editorial director Tracy Matsue Loeffelholz. Tracy is part of the Japanese American community on Bainbridge Island, Washington—the first community in the nation to be rounded up and sent to concentration camps during World War II. Tracy reflects on the meaning of the Japanese saying, nidoto nai yoni: "Let it not happen again," and wonders what communities might do differently to protect the civil liberties of our vulnerable neighbors.

Students will use Tracy Matsue Loeffelholz's article to write about how they might stand up for someone in their school or community—maybe even themselves—who needs protection or support.

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Part 1: The Article

What Japanese Internment Taught Us About Standing Up for Our Neighbors

First, we must demand justice for ourselves. Second, those who have privilege and power must intervene for those without.

How exactly do we "let it not happen again" when federal agents come for our neighbors? What can a community really do to guard civil liberties and lives? Photo by Dorothea Lange via NARA / Flickr.

By Tracy Matsue Loeffelholz

I've been feeling particularly Japanese these days.

That's not entirely unusual. Being mixed race means I experience my races in sometimes unexpected flareups. And now, as more of white America seems to be trying to rid itself of more of brown America, the murmuring about racism from my Japanese community has intensified. They have something to say about this, and it occurs to me that I do, too.

To be sure, some of it is seasonal emotion. Where I live on Bainbridge Island, near Seattle, every March brings spring's first sunshine, early strawberry blossoms, and an anniversary that has marked this community for decades. Seventy-five years ago, on March 30, American citizens and their Japanese-born parents—227 in all—were taken from their homes by soldiers and put on trains and buses to concentration camps. The president's Executive Order 9066 gave these families six days' notice. They were the first in

the nation to be rounded up; eventually 120,000 people were sent to the camps.

In the decades that I've been a part of the Japanese American community here, I've been steeped in survivors' stories of loss and grief—but also their gratitude to non-Japanese neighbors. The community was so supportive that Bainbridge had more Japanese return home after years of incarceration than any other community.

But how exactly do we "let it not happen again" when federal agents come for our neighbors?

Survivors and descendants gather each March at a memorial on the site where they were ferried away. They do that for the same reason they repeat their stories to school children, to visitors, to each other. Because nidoto nai yoni: "Let it not happen again."

You hear that uttered a lot around here. It's a motto with a call to action that shifts. It can be an appeal to justice and compassion: "Let it not happen again ... please?" It can be a demand to stand up: "Let it not happen again ... dammit!" It's the latter that is resonating with me now, a reaction to this new government's racism.

So, OK, nidoto nai yoni! But how exactly do we "let it not happen again" when federal agents come for our neighbors? What can a community really do to guard civil liberties and lives?

In 1942, even this exceptional multiethnic community—home to the only West Coast newspaper that spoke out against the incarceration order—did not gather in the streets and shout, "No! You will not take them away." The nisei (second-generation Japanese Americans), who at least had citizenship, did not rise up and shout, "No!" That was just how things were back then. We must remember we are part of a larger story. We are still here. We are still fighting for our lives, 153 years after my great-great-grandmother Mary watched as our people were senselessly murdered. We should not have to fight so hard to survive on our own lands.

"Seventy-five years ago, everything was so quiet," remembers Kay Sakai Nakao, 97. She's the oldest living survivor, a 22-year-old at the time of her incarceration. "There were no marches, not like today. No one was saying, Don't take our neighbors. I don't think they even thought of that." She says her daughter has asked her why she and other nisei didn't speak up. "We were trying to fit in and do the right thing," she says. "Now, we've learned so much, probably we'd be marching now."

That is true, says Brian Niiya, the content director for the Densho project. "Lending aid and comfort were the limits of the community support they got." For more than 20 years, his organization has made its mission the digital preservation of firsthand stories like Nakao's. Because nidoto nai yoni.

One reason for the lack of protests was that popular opinion on the West Coast was against the Japanese. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, anger and fear were the prevailing emotions. Even the Japanese American Citizens League—at the time a new national civil rights advocacy organization—supported going along with the incarceration order.

"That is the big difference between then and now," Niiya says. "Today, there's no way you could pull off a policy like that against Arab Muslims, or whatever targeted group, without mass protests and civil disobedience."

Public opinion affects political will, and political will makes a difference. When protesters jam airports demanding the release of Muslim travelers or march in the streets with signs, they are forcing politicians to take notice and the world to witness.

Would loud, visible civil disobedience have made a difference back then? Of course, Niiya says, although he finds it inconceivable that there would have been such protests in 1942,

given the political climate after Pearl Harbor. But today, Niiya believes, mass protests and civil disobedience—even the threat—would undoubtedly make a difference.

"It's harder to demonize a group when you know them personally," Niiya points out.

As an example, Niiya points to the case of Hawai'i, a place I know well. That's where my people are from—and still live—where Japanese grandmothers on both sides of my family worked in sugar cane and pineapple fields and raised U.S. citizens.

By rights, Hawai'i should have been the epicenter for irrational response after Pearl Harbor. And while there was martial law and racial ugliness, there was no mass forced removal of the Japanese. Niiya explains that there just wasn't an appetite for it.

The Japanese in Hawai'i made up 37 percent of the population at the time and were fairly well-assimilated, holding business and community leadership positions. Not only was mass removal impractical, but business and political leaders opposed it. "It's harder to demonize a group when you know them personally," Niiya points out.

Robert Shivers was the head of the FBI in Hawai'i at the time. Like so many other influential white people, he and his wife had a live-in Japanese maid. Her name was Shizue Kobatake, and the Shivers family treated her like a daughter. It was Shivers who helped convince President Roosevelt that mass removal of Hawai'i's Japanese was unnecessary.

Another factor: Hawai'i's experience shows what's possible when people feel secure in their rights and community support. The Hawai'i nisei tended not to be submissive, Niiya said; they were used to being in ethnic-majority situations, used to raising their voices and being heard.

In one of Densho's digitally preserved interviews, I watched Bainbridge Island nisei Sadayoshi Omoto—who was 19 at the time of the evacuation and died four years ago—say wistfully that his West Coast nisei cohort perhaps should not have gone to the camps quietly. "Sometimes I wished ... that the niseis stood up and said, No, we won't go.'"

His interviewer asks about the non-Japanese community. "This is the kind of question we get frequently: How did our neighbors react?" Omoto remembers white friends showing kindness and support—but only individually, not in any organized way. "Somewhere along there ... we totally—'we' meaning the niseis—we didn't do our job properly. Maybe ... we should have had a whole mass of Caucasians saying, These are loyal people. But we didn't."

That's what must happen now, says Nakao, 75 years after she obediently boarded a train not knowing where it was taking her. Nidoto nai yoni comes down to this: "We have to fight for them—fight for them!—because not too many people fought for us."

That's what I think too, Kay Nakao. This time, we can't let them take away our neighbors.

Part 2: The Writing Prompt

Think about someone in your school or community who is vulnerable and may need protection or support. This person may be a neighbor or a classmate—it may even be you. Are you willing and brave enough to stand up against injustice? Describe what you would do, and how your actions might make a difference.

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/2CZseX7

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.

It Would Mean the World to Me

Ruby Rose Coney Wynne-Jones, grade 7

When I was in the second grade and living in England, I didn't understand the questions in my math book, and I didn't understand the words in my storybooks. Books were a blur of confusing numbers and words to me. I stayed at the same level of reading for about three years. My teachers, who were impatient and frustrated with my learning, would end up telling me how to get the answer to a math problem or say, "This is how to do it," then give out long droning sighs of disappointment.

One day the second grade math teacher said in front of the whole class, "You don't get this. Go to the first grade classroom." Those words made my cheeks turn bright burning red as everyone in the class turned to stare at me. In my head I was screaming, screaming at myself, "Why can't you just get the problems in the math book or understand the words in the books like everyone else in the class?"

Every week we had assembly. Each student would get a book to read with the songs in it. When it was my turn to get a book, they just skipped me and said to just hum because they knew I couldn't read the book. I just sat there and swallowed my tears, and my face was that stunned, rose color again. I said to myself, "Let this not happen again" but I did not know how to make this come true.

Every day when I got home Mom would say that I had to read and do my homework—then I could do what I wanted. When I had finished that torturing painful book, I got a piece of paper and drew. Drawing was my way out of that dark space of numbers and letters that swirled around my head like a hurricane. When I draw, the sun comes out.

The next year, my mom drove me to a city and told me I was going to a special doctor. I thought to myself, "I hate doctors," and wondered why this one was special. We went upstairs to a room and opened the door to where a nice lady with a kind face stood behind the door. My mom sat down in the corner next to the window with the white curtains drawn and sunlight peeking through them.

The lady told me to sit on the chair in front of the desk; she sat next to me and pulled out some card games and mind puzzles. I thought, "I like games, so this can't be a doctor." As I played the games with her, she wrote things on a clipboard. When it seemed like an hour had gone by, the lady showed my mom a paper and then we left. When I went to school the next day, the teacher told me to sit at the table with the people who got their own separate teacher. When I got home, my mom told me that the place I had gone to the day before was to see if I had dyslexia. She told me that I had dyslexia.

The YES! Magazine article, "What Japanese Internment Taught Us About Standing Up for Our Neighbors," by Tracy Matsue Loeffelholz, talks about how nobody stood up for Japanese people in World War II. I want to stand

up for kids with dyslexia or ADHD— to let it not happen again like when our neighbors on Bainbridge island were taken away. We should consider that kids who struggle with reading or writing may have dyslexia or ADHD. Don't just judge them as stupid. I was one of those kids who didn't get it like everyone else. I was the one who everyone thought was stupid. I want to stand up for those kids who are suffering, so that they can be treated like everyone else and not have to go through what I did.

In Loeffelholz's article, 97-year-old internment survivor Kay Sakai Nakao said, "We have to fight for them—fight for them!—because not too many people fought for us." I want to fight for kids with dyslexia by putting more paraeducators in schools in England and America, to help people who are not getting the help they need. I am standing up for these people like nobody did for me.

Nidoto nai yoni—let it not happen again. Don't humiliate children with learning disabilities. Don't judge people who aren't as good at things. Don't treat them differently— treat them the same way you treat everyone else because they aren't that different. When they ask for help, it could mean the world to them if you did, because I know it did when people helped me.

An Unanswered Cry for Help

By Alexandria Lutinski, grade 8

I heard the door creak open as I worked on my assignment. I looked up and saw Charlie with a new kid. Charlie's one of the school monitors; he's the only employee at Goodnight who students talk to on a first-name basis. Our teacher had told us that we were getting a new student. She was a bit nervous as the adults exchanged words. "Hello, I'm Mrs. Recio, why don't you introduce yourself?" my teacher said kindly as she shook the student's hand.

What happened next shocked me.

The student's voice was bold as she spoke, "Hello, I'm a student from Comal County. I'm 12 years old and was born September 13th, 2003." She wasn't scared of being new, she seemed... proud? Her voice sculpted her words like delicate clay. She resembled a teacher in her stance, her voice, and her strong, agile footsteps, as she took her seat.

Her introduction may have been powerful, but strength often fades to weakness. I noticed the tension around her. I felt the thickness of the air. The tremble of her hand as she listened to the world around her. A soft breath of air could shatter her world like a snow globe falling to the floor.

Her poetic writing brought confusion to her new teachers. What happened over the summer while I was away? The delicate faded gray designs traced onto bleached paper. Designs of hatred, evil, and war.

The year aged. I saw her slip on the ice in her mind. A mind full of creativity and growth that was locked behind by a greater force. The tremble of her hand a constant reminder of her fear. She's running away from everything, but a force beyond her control brings her back.

Why don't I help her?

I can't. She's beyond help that she can ask for. I want to help her. I'm the voice trapped inside her mind. Yes, I am the girl. The strong voice that faded into a dark hole of despair. I begged for help, but, of course, the smart and intelligent girl couldn't need help. She's too good for depression. Too good for anxiety.

Was she really too good for it now?

I feel the burning embers of a fire deep in my heart, the perfect snow globe that shatters on the floor. Icy blood meanders through my body like a jellied river.

Lost tears never dance down the pale skin of my face. Pale wrists never see the fresh crimson cuts from a razor. Dark brown strands of hair never feel the delicate weave of braids.

Swimming through wave after wave of emotions. Anger, sadness, fear, and anxiety. Day after day of torment and war inside my own mind breaks me down to ash on the ground.

Black and White

Black and white
Two opposites
Two colors
But really are they colors?

One absorbs all light
One reflects all light
One is dark
One is light

Some people see
Only these two shades
Others see all
Reds, blues, and more

Imagine only seeing
Black and white
And all shades between

No bright colors
No dull colors
Just black
And white

You can see the
Truth behind a pigment
How dull or how bright
Maybe the color tells a tale

Black and white...
Black and white...
Black and white...

—Alexandria Lutinski 12/8/16

Even though I see all colors, I can't feel them. The brightest blues to the darkest greens. Colors show me that the world is much brighter than I am. It's an egregious curse that I have developed over many cold years.

Being a bisexual teenager has been a nightmare. My parents are accepting, but my grandmother has tried "Praying the gay away!" Why do people deliberately hurt others who don't fit into their beliefs? "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." ~ Mark 12:31, King James Bible. If you mistreat your neighbor, then you are expressing that you want to bring others down.

So I continue my life. The outcast, bisexual teenager who just wants to have a normal life. The life many others get to live every day. My snow globe has shattered. Now it's my turn to step out and be me. Still, there are many others trapped in their own snow globes. And they need your support and kindness. Just like I did.

Bringing a Voice Back to Life

By Logan Bailey Crews, grade 11

"I'm literally going to kill myself."

With no context, a proposed death threat would raise red flags. To naive teenagers, such a threat is a typical response after a test, in-class essay, or even after a teacher hands out homework.

I've had days throughout my high school career where each day builds another story onto my skyscraper of self-loathing. I've had days where each class claws at my conscience, pointing out my flaws and giving me reasons why I shouldn't exist. I've had days where each lunch period laughs at my inability to smile over the pain, and taunts me to jump off the building constructed in my head.

Being suicidal at school is feeling so vulnerable that every day is a push further to the edge of the skyscraper. Last winter, a silence took over my brain so deafening that even a pen clicking from across the room sounded like an alarm ringing, telling me to evacuate now—or else!

Being suicidal at school is giving up class periods to collapse on the bathroom floor, hoping that no one finds me. At the same time, I also hoped someone would save me in case I let myself dangle over the edge of the skyscraper. Being suicidal at school is watching others claim they are suicidal from only stressing over homework or fuming about a test grade. The overdramatic teenage culture that worships the aesthetic of mental illness but avoids its consequences creates an environment where students who do feel suicidal don't feel safe or accepted.

With recovery from suicidal behavior under my belt, I go to school every day ready to stand up for people who are currently struggling. Sometimes all it takes to start breaking down the stigma against suicide is to pay attention to kids who act the way I did. Sometimes all it takes is to give them a compliment on the way out of the classroom. I've had days where knowing my hair, if nothing else, looks nice pulls me out of the gutter. Sometimes, though, I know I can't change an entire school's mindset with a few nice words to a couple of students a day.

Tracy Matsue Loeffelholz explained in "What Japanese Internment Taught Us About Standing Up for Our Neighbors" that people feel more comfortable speaking up about problems around them "when people feel secure in [...] community support." Positive growth around mental illness in a high school happens best when students feel like their classmates support them. While I was struggling with suicide, I wanted to help break the stigma against students like me. Every day, I heard ignorant people mock mental illness and the affected, like me, remained silent. Finally, I forced myself out of the bed my depression wanted to trap me in, carried my courage like a shield, and I joined Kirkwood High School's Suicide Awareness Week (SAW) committee.

Over the past year, I've joined forces with a board of other students who want to rip holes through the stigma around mental illness at school. I've talked with

counselors and students with experiences similar to mine to better grasp the issue of teen suicide at KHS and the rest of the country. I've helped gather statistics on how many students actually face depression and other illnesses every day, and I've felt the shock of knowing the majority of students at my school either deals with mental illness themselves or knows someone who does.

After working on the SAW committee, I've realized that we, the vulnerable, suicidal kids, are more willing to fight the stereotype of the depressed, emo kid than those who make depression-themed Instagram accounts and relentlessly use "kill myself" or "kms" as a text response. I've recognized that those people are in the minority, and the ones struggling are sometimes just too quiet to be heard.

Now, I'm not silent. Now, I'm yelling about my experiences with suicide from the rooftop of the skyscraper—not from the edge. Each day, I work toward creating a safe environment where students can speak up without others burdening them with the weight of an unjust stereotype. The suicidal kid doesn't have to be the one in the back of an obscure art class with piercings and dyed-blue bangs covering their eyes. It can be the "normal," kid in an AP class with a smile on their face who never shuts their mouth.

I know, because that kid is me.

And because I stand up for myself, I'm still here.

Highs and Lows

By Aly Terry, grade 11

There's this thing my brain has. This thing that controls my moods, my thoughts, my behavior, my everything. I guess you could say my brain is this thing that gives me highs greater than any drug and lows deeper than craters. This thing plants mountains and valleys in my mind so that I can only see one step in front of me. So I can only act with its permission. This thing is bipolar. My brain is bipolar. I am bipolar.

Bipolar: a mental illness that brings severe high and low moods and changes in sleep, energy, thinking, and behavior.

Bipolar, also known as manic depression, conquers my world. Throughout my sixteen years of existence, I have had twice the amount of bipolar episodes than birthdays. And the only presents I have received from my friends and family is fear. Fear that my bipolar gets me too caught up in my own head. Fear that my bipolar will bring them down. Fears of my ups and downs.

Mania ("the ups"): excessive happiness, changing suddenly from being joyful to irritability, restlessness, poor concentration, showing poor judgement, or being impulsive.

My most immense "up" came when I was with my little sister. After weeks of seemingly normal behavior, I received some amazing news and was ready to take over the world: my dad wanted back into my life. This meant the world to my nine-year-old heart. I was happy. Elated. Couldn't keep my feet on the ground. So I decided I would drive to him. I stole the keys to our van, with my little sister in the front seat, and started to drive the twenty miles to see him. Almost two minutes later, the wind rustling through my curls, we got in a car accident. I hit my head on the dashboard and now I have seizures.

Depressive periods ("the downs"): sadness, not enjoying things you once enjoyed, loss of energy, trouble concentrating, uncontrollable crying, insomnia, thoughts of death, attempts of suicide.

My most immense down came when I was by myself. Again, after seemingly normal behavior, I received some life-altering news and couldn't handle this world. My best friend, Sen, killed himself. And it broke my heart. My brain decided the only way my heart would stop breaking is if I were with him. So I tried. I came home from school, blade in hand, and cut so deep in my skin that my bones felt it. I needed to let my blood make love with the floor so my spirit could escape to be with my best friend. I didn't succeed. The ambulance was faster than my hands. In another five minutes, I would have been dead. What my family saw as grief was actually a bipolar episode that I could not control. Bipolar is this thing that my brain can't control.

I may not be able to control much, but I can control the words that I write and why I write them. I'm writing this for awareness. Like those innocent Japanese individuals in Tracy Loeffelholz's article,

"What Japanese Internment Taught Us About Standing Up for Our Neighbors," I am vulnerable. My disease makes me vulnerable. Bipolar disorder makes 5.7 million Americans vulnerable; and sometimes we can't protect ourselves. We can't stand up for ourselves because our brains will make a morgue of our mouths. This loud disease will make us silent.

So I come to you, everybody reading this. When our heads are louder than our mouths, you are our only hope. Although everyone's highs and lows may not be as disastrous as mine, they are still there with dangerous potential. Please, help protect us. Talk to us. Offer support and patience. Be understanding and encourage us to get help because we can get better. We can learn to see not just the ups and downs but everything in-between. Help us see that the middle isn't hurtful, but beautiful.

Escaping the "Other" Side

By Adithi Ramakrishnan, grade 12

On a cold Friday evening, my family stumbled into a local Italian restaurant. Sandwiched between my grandparents, I squeezed their hands tightly as we piled into a narrow booth. Their visit from India was drawing to a close, but I intended to make the most of every last minute. We passed laminated menus to each other and began laughing, talking, and deliberating. I tugged at the chunni of my grandmother's traditional Indian salwar kameez and pointed out my personal favorites to her in our native language. Then, something at the table beside us caught my eye. I glanced over.

I quickly turned away. Maybe I'd misunderstood.

Then, I snuck a second, more apprehensive look. My stomach lurched.

An elderly white couple was dining at the table next to ours. The wife's eyes were fixed on her menu, but her husband's were fixed on us. His eyebrows curved downwards in a cold, steely glare. I looked away again, a worm of doubt squirming in my chest. But every time my gaze wandered, it met his icy stare, and my insides turned over.

For the rest of the evening, I switched to English.

That chilly night at Lucia's, I felt something I'd experienced only in doses before: the feeling of being the other. I don't fit into an easily categorized box. I'm still trying to navigate the narrow path between Indian and American, and I'm the furthest thing from an old white male. Just because I'm not the model portrait of a 1950s American doesn't mean I can't repaint that image in the 21st century.

"Standing up against injustice" is a broad statement, but represents something very specific: inclusion and acceptance. We have to stop sorting people into the "other" category—we not only have to recognize the humanity in each other, but we also have to be willing to fight for it. It's a simple change in perspective that can have immediate implications. Tracy Matsue Loeffelholz refers to it in her article, "What Japanese Internment Taught Us About Standing Up for Our Neighbors," as an appeal to raise our voices in support of those that need it most—not merely to show support, but also to protest unfair treatment.

But what about me? What happens when I'm the target of raised eyebrows and consistent "random" searches at the airport, while white passengers walk by unnoticed?

It has taken me time to define my version of protesting injustice, and I will likely reshape my definition in the future. But For now, dissension means living my culture as boldly and loudly as possible. It means stringing lights through the shrubbery outside our house and lighting sparklers to illuminate our cul-de-sac on Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights. It means getting up thirty minutes early to pin my dupatta and come to school in my brightest,

most vibrant traditional clothing for International Day. It means making quips to my family in Tamil when we're in public. To me, standing up for my culture is normalizing diversity while letting my Indian and American roots shine.

Loeffelholz says that "public opinion affects political will, and political will makes a difference." I wholeheartedly agree. If we as Americans present a united front—one that includes people of all races, genders, and sexualities—labeling each other not as other but as together, it becomes much harder to tear us apart. The next time I catch an unfriendly stare in a public place, I won't turn away.
I'll start a conversation—not with "How could you?," but "How are you?"

To Know Her is to Love Her

By Amber Huff, university

We perceive others through eyes conditioned by our personal socialization, often leading us to misinterpret the true character of those who we have just met. In the YES! article, "What Japanese Internment Taught Us About Standing Up for Our Neighbors" author Tracy Matsue Loeffelholz, emphasizes how capable our society is of standing up for the vulnerable, unlike we were seven decades before today. Three weeks ago, fifteen-year-old Angela, strolled into the library where I work, with her tan bandana tied taut across her forehead as if it were the only thing keeping her broken life from shattering into pieces.

This brilliant adolescent has taught me more about life than the past fourteen years of my formal education: that no one deserves to be judged solely based on their history and ethnicity. Angela grew up on the streets of Madera, California, where she made her way in and out of psychological institutions and jail cells. Depression, encouraged by the disarray of her life, plagued Angela's mind, driving her to fashion a homemade noose in a final attempt to abolish her reality. Though Angela has physically survived her past, she bears the scars of knives that have split open her skin. These memories influence the night terrors that taunt the recesses of her beautiful mind.

Three months ago, Angela was offered the liberty to fly over fifteen hundred miles from her previous life to live with her father here in Texas. Most of the residents in our tiny town of less than one thousand people judged Angela harshly based on her appearance alone. Rumors about her past spread instantaneously and captured the attention of the school police officers.

Within weeks, Angela was referred to DEAP (Developmental Educational Assistance Program) for possession of Nyquil. There were no questions about why she had the nighttime flu medication, all that she had a self-destructive history and that she potentially would be a negative influence on her peers. As claimed in Loeffelholz's paper, the fight for justice for the loyal is minimal. Though we cannot prevent the trials and tribulationsof others, we can be there to help them in their times of need.

Upon hearing her stories and having spent time with Angela, I found that beneath the oversized hoody and ink-stained knuckles, she is the most genuine, heroic, altruistic, talented, humorous, but broken individual that I have ever met. Regardless of the way I view her, Angela possesses the self-perception of worthlessness. When she walks through town, she faces an unfair sentence from those community members who can't see beyond the color of their skin and her trauma-filled past. Their crime is that they feed the negative emotions Angela already has about herself, and deny themselves from seeing the beauty and vulnerability that lies beneath.

Across our nation there are people just like Angela who suffer from unjust condemnation. This knowledge buries itself deep within the marrow of my bones and encourages me to put aside my trivial frustrations and place Angela atop my priority list. In my own simplistic way, I reiterate my personal motto and call for action as suggested in Loeffelholz's article. I encourage every patron who walks through the threshold of my library not to judge others based on the clothes on their back, and to take into consideration a person's experiences before formulating a concrete opinion. My meager attempts to help this young lady reaches far beyond her benefit. Without Angela, I would continue to judge people before ever having known them.

On the surface, Angela seems like the same shattered girl who once lived on the streets of a concrete city. Yet her aspiration for life has blossomed and exposes itself in her words. Instead of creating raps that spew the voice of hurt and hatred, Angela now sings the song of hope and gratitude. I can only imagine how many lives would be saved if others were to open their arms to the brokenhearted. Small acts of kindness like a "Hi, how are you?" check-in, or offering a ride to school. Had the roles been reversed, they, too, no doubt would crumble beneath the pressure of judgement.