PEACE ESSAY CONTEST, RYLA 2025

FIRST PLACE:

Sraavya Doddapaneni, Brownell Talbot. Sponsored by Omaha Morning Rotary

To me, peace isn't just about not having wars between countries. Instead, it's really much more than that. I think it's about understanding each other, respecting our differences, and choosing to work together as a whole instead of fighting. Even if there's no fighting or wars going on, there still won't be world peace if we can't trust each other. True peace means actually caring about other countries and helping each other out, not about holding grudges or treating each other with inequality. If we could all work together with understanding and ambition, we would have a chance to solve problems that affect the whole world. For example, poverty or climate change. Without that kind of peace - true peace where we all genuinely care for each other - the world, as a whole, can't move forward together.

I definitely believe that ordinary citizens can help bring peace among nations. Peace doesn't need to start with laws or rules regulated by the government. It can start with people who choose to portray characteristics like kindness, respect, and understanding in their everyday lives. When ordinary people learn about different cultures, speak out against hate or discrimination, and treat others with equality, it makes a big difference. Those people can help build a world where everyone is inclusive. It can start with small actions like supporting global charities, volunteering, or even just having respectful conversations about our differences. These things can make a big impact over time. If more people tried to see the world from others' perspectives, it would truly benefit the world for generations to come.

Young people can do a lot to improve international peace, even if they feel like these big changes are too complex for them. They can start by just learning about other countries and cultures, so they're open minded and more educated about diversity. Making connections with people around the world - either online or in person - helps build understanding between communities. Social media is a big concept in today's society, and young people can use their social media platforms to speak up against discriminatory or hate speech, spread positive messages, and spread awareness to support causes that will bring people together. Small acts, like participating in a cultural fair or volunteering with a global organization can make an impact over time. When young people stand up for kindness and respect, they are showing the world that a more peaceful future is possible.

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SECOND PLACE:

Cora Jones, Lincoln East High School. Sponsored by Lincoln South Rotary

When the world around us is plagued by the harsh, relentless din of clashing ideologies, ceaseless misinformation, and unforgiving sounds of wartime and conflict, peace can often be mischaracterized as silence. The absence of noise, for most; a moment where, for the first time in years, they can hear themselves think. While this might be peace*ful,* silence is not synonymous with peace. To find peace, we must first acknowledge that the journey will never be complacent, and rather with hope and communication. It's a long road to peace as I see it – to equality, for everyone. It may not be achieved in my lifetime, but it definitely won't be achieved without change, which cannot happen in stillness. Protests in favor of change that are advertised as "peaceful" are non-violent, not silent, so we know that peace is not the lack of noise, but the freedom to make it.

Right now, at this moment, we have the most communication ever available. For most of our society's peace-making journey, however, this has not been the case. Now, it is, yet we are living in one of the most disruptive periods in history. Information is at our fingertips, yet some choose time after time to be ignorant of the struggles of others, voiced at long last. We have the option to give every single citizen an equal voice, and we are given the incredible opportunity to listen, yet we make little effort to place microphones in the hands of our most powerful speakers. You and I have the tools in our hands to bring your most important issue to light – and it doesn't need national attention to happen. Passing legislation in the name of equality is powerful, but these ideas have to be promoted at a local, interpersonal scale to have an impact on real people, with real words, real connections, and real peace. We must use what we have available to bring peace to our communities – and remember that the personal definition of peace and tranquility is different from the one that will bring about change. Equality cannot be achieved by complacency or silence; no matter how secret the motive, it must be voiced to happen, whether that's in a darkened hallway or a national convention. Peace is never, has never been, and will never be quiet, and so we can never expect the journey to be such.

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THIRD PLACE:

Stella Davis, Lincoln Southwest High School. Sponsored by Lincoln Giving Spirits

שלום

In most languages we use the word peace to describe a time without warfare or violence, but in Hebrew they have a word that describes a more complete state of serenity; shalom. The closest English translation of shalom is peace, but there is a lot more to this concept than that. The root word shalam means complete or whole, and missing nothing. This concept of shalom comes directly from that, with the idea that we were meant to live in a world with many moving pieces and parts that should all come together to form this complete and perfect wholeness. Shalom is that in all of the complexities of the world, we can achieve a faultless and replete world where people come together to achieve a perfect peace where we can thrive. Another example of this idea in ancient times was enemies that made shalom. Instead of this modern concept that peace is the absence of fighting, they would create shalom with their enemies and start working together in a way that benefited everyone. They would not only fix what was broken but also build a state of human flourishing. In a country created with the ideals of ensuring domestic tranquility and securing the blessings of Liberty for us and our prosperity, I do not believe that we should live in a place where we settle for the absence of violence. Instead we need to embrace shalom, and create a place where we aren't just content with the absence of conflict but are in a world where we are thriving and in harmony with each other. I hope that this can be a call to action, and that we realize that shalom is only possible if we are all working together. On our own a world of shalom is not attainable, but if we all were to come together I believe that we will see a day of true peace where we as individuals and a society can thrive.