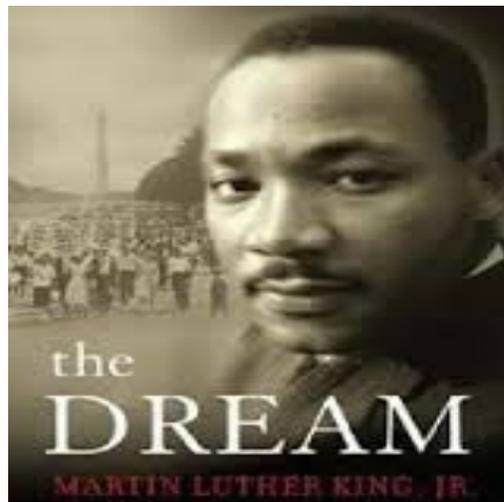


# Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest Winners



**"I have a dream that one day... (we) will be able to sit  
down together at the table of brotherhood."**

August 28, 1963

**MERIDEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Here, Students Succeed



**Meriden, Connecticut**

**January 21, 2019**

*Here, Students Succeed*

# ESSAY WINNERS -

**Adam Pitcher**

Elementary School Winner -  
*Nathan Hale School*

**Anthony Valerie**

Middle School Winner -  
*Washington Middle School*

**Lananh Tran**

High School Winners -  
*Maloney High School*

**Rebecca Wozniak**

High School Winners -  
*Platt High School*



## **ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WINNER**

### **Adam Pitcher - Nathan Hale School**

#### **What advice would Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. give to students in our school today?**

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” - Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King was born on January 15, 1929 and died on April 4, 1968. He grew up to be a minister. He gave a famous speech that changed the world forever. Sadly, just 5 years after Dr. King gave his speech preaching his dreams for the future he was assassinated. Today, we honor Martin Luther King for how he stopped segregation and how he changed the world’s perspective on life. If he was alive today he would offer advice to students in our school.

If Martin Luther King were here at my school today the first thing he would say is to treat people equally. He would say that because he has experienced discrimination. When he was a little boy, he was not allowed to play with little white boys. Dr. King knew what the consequences would be if he even thought about being friends with children who were white. Today, he would be proud because he would see me and my fellow classmates of all nationalities getting along with each other. Dr. King would smile while seeing us being friends with kids of every skin color. Treating people equally is one piece of advice he would give.

Another piece of advice Martin Luther King would give is to be non-violent. He would say that violence doesn’t solve your problems, it makes them worse. He would know. While he was protesting and standing up for what he believed in his fellow comrades would say why can’t we fight? Martin Luther King would always say it would just make matters worse. When people fought against people who believed what Dr. King believed they would use weapons and violence, but Martin and his friends kept marching their way to freedom and new rights. Some got injured, they were still marching. Some were thrown in jail, they were still marching. Some were forced out of the county, but they were still marching. Dr. King used non-violence while fighting for freedom and this would be some advice he would share with students at my school.

If Martin Luther King gave any advice today it would be to follow your dreams. He would definitely say that because he wrote a speech called “I Have a Dream.” If he were to come to the school, he would share his speech. He would say “I have a dream that one day little black girls and little black boys will join hands with little white boys and little white girls and become brothers and sisters.” The speech has meaning and heart in it. He would encourage us to follow our dreams even when times were tough. If Martin Luther King were here today he would definitely say to follow your dreams.

If Martin Luther King were alive he would give us important advice today, including to treat people equally, to be non-violent when fighting for what you believe in, and to follow your dreams. We would all agree that this is great advice that could really benefit our students today.

## **MIDDLE SCHOOL WINNER**

### **Anthony Valerie – Washington Middle School**

#### **What advice would Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. give to students in our school today?**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a baptist minister and social advocate who worked fearlessly for social equality for African Americans. He was an integral leader of the Civil Rights Movement and played a pivotal role in advocating for equality. Dr. King, Jr. inspired many individuals by using unique types of non-violent protests that were safe for bystanders while also being extremely effective. He is perhaps best known for the March on Washington in 1963. This was a massive protest in which 250,000 people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. in protest. This is where Dr. King, Jr. delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. Dr. King, Jr. was unique in this way and in many others. That is why I believe that he would be very vocal on the many issues students face today.

One area that I believe that Dr. King, Jr. would address is the importance of being an independent leader. I believe that Dr. King, Jr. would address this because there are a lot of what I call “followers” in our schools today. “Followers” are people who aren’t independent and can’t think for themselves. They go along with whatever someone tells them and rely on people who are more independent. Dr. King, Jr. would address this because he is a stern believer that you create your own success. He believed this because he knew you can get nowhere in life being a “follower.” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “A genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus.” Dr. King was a leader who had a vision for a better life. I believe that he would ask each of us to examine what our dream for a better future is and then tell us to figure out what we can do to make that happen. I feel that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would want us to all know that we each have the power within us to create change.

Dr. King, Jr. would further encourage to persevere through challenges that come our way. I feel that Dr. King, Jr. would address this issue because far too often students give up when things become too difficult. It’s easier to give up and walk away, rather than put in the hard work and effort. Often times students today when facing challenges and obstacles believe they can’t do anything to overcome the problem. This results in the students giving up rather than trying to solve the problem. Dr. King, Jr. would address this by sharing with students how people said unkind and hurtful things to and about him, yet he continued to fight and persevere through. Dr. King, Jr. would also address this by sharing how he had to deal with racial persecution. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “If you can’t fly then run, if you can’t run then walk, if you can’t walk then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.” This tells me that Dr. King, Jr. did not believe in giving up.

Furthermore Dr. King, Jr. would stress to students at our school the importance of having good moral character, beliefs and values. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s faith was something that was very important to him. It was his Christian beliefs that helped him to advocate that all people are created equal and should be treated with the same kindness, love and respect regardless of race. We as a society have come so far from those days. In fact, it may be difficult for some of us in the younger generations to understand or even relate to this issue. We have been fortunate to grow up in a different world. However, we need only look back two generations to see a very different America. That being said, we as a country are struggling with other areas such as immigration and religious intolerance. These are very hot button topics and there are many people on opposite sides of the fence, with their own understanding and interpretation of our U.S. Constitution. I think that if Dr. King, Jr. was alive today he would have a great deal to say on these topics and he would be in a unique position to do so. I think that Dr. King, Jr. would tell us that wherever we are in our walk in life that we need to stand up for the less represented and the less fortunate. As students, this would start with where we are in school. How are we treating our fellow students and staff members? Are we showing kindness,

compassion and respect? Dr. King, Jr. would probably be disheartened by the lack of support students give each other because too many times in school people just watch bullying happen. They do this while being bystanders and not doing anything to intervene and help stop it. Dr. King, Jr. would tell the students to stand up for each other and be each other's friends. Dr. King, Jr. said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that." I believe that Dr. King, Jr. would tell us to be the light and love for others to see and follow.

I believe that Dr. King, Jr. would address to students the need to be independent leaders, persevering through challenges, and standing up for the less represented and less fortunate. Dr. King, Jr. would address being independent because he believes that only you can create your success. King, Jr. would address preserving through challenges because it creates a strong character and accomplishments. Dr. King, Jr. would also address standing up for the less represented and fortunate because friends shouldn't allow other friends to go through difficult circumstances by themselves. According to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Everyman must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness."

# HIGH SCHOOL WINNERS

## Lananh Tran - Maloney High School

### **What advice would Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. give to students in our school today?**

If Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were alive, he would remind us that because complete equality is rare, we must be aware of inequality and its far reaching effects. He would tell us that we must treat each other with respect and to abandon our prejudices. Dr. King would specifically tell students in Meriden that each and every individual matters, is valuable, and has the potential to grow and to make positive changes.

Awareness is the precursor to any big change or movement. There is always a potential for inequality anywhere where there is diversity. And there's diversity everywhere. Even within our community, there are people from all different kinds of backgrounds who differ in religious, financial, social, sexual, gender, racial, cultural, and educational backgrounds. Diversity offers many benefits such as variation in opinion and opportunities to learn about other walks of life, but why does inequality still exist? It still exists because people still have prejudices, and inequality is built into our society. Social and economic disparity have persisted throughout history and affect members of all races, but especially minorities. Systemic racism is built into society and can influence every facet of life from educational opportunities to public funding. Socioeconomic inequality makes the playing field uneven and unfairly tosses aside those who aren't wealthy or privileged. Throughout Dr. King's career, he aimed to publicize and raise awareness of the suffering and detriment of disadvantaged and marginalized groups. In Dr. King's Letter From Birmingham Jail, he informs his audience of the "negative peace" that conceals underlying racial tension. Dr. King compares the underlying injustices to a boil that must be exposed in order to heal. "Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion, before it can be cured." Dr. King's words are still applicable now; he would advise us to not obscure the struggles of marginalized groups and to be aware of issues regarding inequality.

However, there are people who would argue against the existence of inequality. While it is true that there have been improvements in issues like racial discrimination, the problems haven't disappeared entirely. Evidence can be found in correlations between race, lower levels of education, and poverty. Racial minorities are more likely to be in poverty than whites. Racial minorities are also more likely to drop out of school. Inequality in economic status extends to every other sphere of life. Minorities, due to systemic racism, historically were pushed aside into smaller, poorer communities with little funding. The schools in these communities had and still have fewer resources and simply cannot compete with schools of wealthier communities. This causes a wide gap in educational opportunity. With fewer educational opportunities, minorities are less likely than privileged groups to find high-paying jobs. Consequently lower income leads to even fewer opportunities.

While it is true that blunt racism and other forms of outright discrimination still exist, it should also be noted that even minor prejudices can accumulate to act as a barrier to wider acceptance of current marginalized groups. A significant number of people have or have had prejudices of some kind. Prejudices can stem from preconceived notions and ignorance. Seemingly insignificant prejudices can lead to unintentional discrimination. Small biases and exclusion are obstacles to acceptance. Acceptance is the key solution to discrimination. If people were more aware of their prejudices, were more open to acceptance, and to educating themselves, we would all be more well informed and could begin to understand and empathize with others regardless of our differences. It is impossible for everyone to have the same opinion, but if everybody thought of and treated others on a basic human level, completely disregarding any attributes that they might view as unagreeable, we would be closer to Dr. King's ideal. Dr. King in his "I Have a Dream" speech stated that he dreamt of a day where his children would be judged based on the "content of their character" as opposed to

their skin color. We must continue to work together for this type of vision. Changes on a small scales, even a change in attitude of one person, could create a ripple effect.

Shifting our perspective as a whole would be beneficial to those who face discrimination. In addition to urging that, Dr. King would most likely try to reach out and encourage those who are directly affected by systemic inequality or discrimination by telling them that they are not just statistics. While it is extremely difficult and there would be many obstacles, it is certainly possible to work towards positive change, whether that be through higher education, a lifestyle change, or through career goals. This is a message that needs to be told to all students: that they have the talent and the chance to strive for greater opportunities. This idea needs to be reinforced because many students are discouraged because of lack of opportunity like absence of financial support or connections and also because many students eventually grow to lose hope in their own futures. If we can change the mindsets of our students, our future generation of adults will become more resilient, diverse, accepting, and bright.

Dr. King was one of the most iconic proponents of equality for all. He would commend us for our progress, most notably the reduction of our country's racial tension. Aside from that, Dr. King would also push us towards further amelioration of our country's existing problems of socioeconomic disparity and the marginalization of minority groups. Dr. King would tell us that we are a part of the future that will eventually gain authority to possibly make these changes and that it is our choice of what kind of environment in which we want future generations to grow up.

# HIGH SCHOOL WINNERS

## Rebecca Wozniak - Platt High School

### **What advice would Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. give to students in our school today?**

It has been just 55 years since Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and delivered one of the most significant and well-known speeches in history. He stood in front of a crowd of 250,000 people who were hopeful for change and could see that Dr. King was the man who would make it happen. A civil rights leader and Baptist minister, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. fought the injustices of discrimination and segregation and paved a more bright future for African-Americans up until his assassination in 1968. The world has changed a great deal since then, but his message to the youth of America hasn't. If he were alive today, he would remind us to not hate because we are different, to never respond to violence with violence, and to never stay quiet when we see injustices occurring.

It is a common perception among Americans that discrimination ended after the 1960's. Unfortunately, this is not true. Discrimination, although more veiled, still exists today. Our political culture has divided us and our leaders have convinced us that our differences make us too different. Today our schools aren't segregated, but our own institutions still suffer from the effects of systemic racism. Then it was lynching, today it's police brutality. It's the same thing just a different name. It isn't a coincidence that black people are more likely to be killed than white people by the police. Dr. King said it best, "We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now." All of us come from different backgrounds, ethnicities, religions, financial standings, but we all must be tolerant of our differences and work together to achieve a common goal: equity and equality. We can't let our differences divide us or we will only fail ourselves.

Dr. King once said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter," and it is just as relevant now as it was then. Injustices happen all of the time and we must dare to be the one who stands up and says, "this is not right" - even if we stand alone. It takes courage to stand against the current, but it is those who do that change history. If Rosa Parks hadn't refused to get up from her seat that day, would the world be the same? If Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had stopped fighting for equality after his house was bombed in 1956, would the world be the same? We can't know for sure, but we do know that their contributions were instrumental in forming a more accepting society. When injustices are not challenged, they will run rampant. They must be challenged for the common good because "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Non-violent protest is what made Dr. King's message resonate with so many Americans. He showed us that an "eye for an eye" only makes us all blind. Nonviolence is more powerful than violence, it seems contradictory, but it's true. You cannot stoop as low as violence because the people you face are not your enemy. They are the people you most show the most love to, they are the people who you strive to change because they are the people who need it the most. Responding with violence in any aspect of one's life is never the right choice, it only further escalates the situation. As Dr. King said, "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that." You can't drive hate out of people's hearts with hatred, only with love.

In closing, Dr. King's message is applicable to any time. He preached a universal message of nonviolence, love, and personal courage in the face of immorality. His words were powerful, but they alone could not change society. It is the people who were inspired by those words and stood up and fought for what was right that changed history. We are all possible of fostering change, we just have to have the courage to believe we can.

**SCHOOL ESSAY WINNERS  
2018-2019**

<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>
Elijah Spikes	John Barry School
Sophia Roman	Benjamin Franklin School
<b>Adam Pitcher</b>	<b>Nathan Hale School</b>
Isabella Leone	Hanover School
Reilly Lewia	Thomas Hooker School
Xavion Saucier	Casimir Pulaski School
Arissa Moore	Israel Putnam School
Liam Moylan	Roger Sherman School
Humyra Ferdus	Lincoln Middle School
Mikayla Bunnell	Lincoln Middle School
Olivia Valery	Washington Middle School
<b>Anthony Valerie</b>	<b>Washington Middle School</b>
Courtney Ubaiké	Maloney High School
<b>Lananh Tran</b>	<b>Maloney High School</b>
Anahi Gutierrez	Platt High School
<b>Rebecca Wozniak</b>	<b>Platt High School</b>