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UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO  
Do the Write Thing

*Student Writings*  
2005

Utah Board of Juvenile Justice

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UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO DO THE WRITE THING

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The Wheeler Foundation

Marion Mattingly,  
Executive Director  
National Campaign to Stop Violence

Kuwait-America Foundation

UTAH'S FIFTH ANNUAL CHALLENGE TO

# Do the Write Thing

## **The Importance of the Do the Write Thing Challenge**

*Do the Write Thing* is not about winning a prize. It is an essential part of a long-term strategy to help students and adults better understand each other and work together to prevent youth violence.

The *Do the Write Thing* Challenge is a program of the National Campaign to Stop Violence, which motivates students to make a personal, written commitment to resist and combat youth violence in their communities. Young people around the country are encouraged to voice their solutions for reducing violence that destroys so many young lives. The program works because it recognizes that the best solutions come from communities where violence takes place.

Utah's *Do the Write Thing Challenge* is sponsored locally by the Utah Board of Juvenile Justice. The Board monitors Utah's compliance with the core requirements of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. The Board is also responsible for administering more than \$1,000,000 in federal juvenile justice funds aimed at filling gaps in the continuum of juvenile justice services from prevention to treatment. Members are appointed by Utah's Governor.

## **How the Campaign Works**

The Utah Board of Juvenile Justice sent information to all Utah school district superintendents and middle school principals encouraging them to involve their teachers and 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in the Challenge. Teachers were given suggestions about how to tie the Challenge into course work. Students could research youth violence as part of a history class, write a poem as part of an English class, or even consider youth violence from a social science perspective. Following a classroom discussion about youth violence, students were asked to write answers to three questions:

How has youth violence affected my life?

What are the causes of youth violence?

What can my community and I do to reduce youth violence?

School districts reported that more than 900 students participated in this year's Challenge with nearly 800 submitting essays. The Board selected 12 finalists whose work was then forwarded to Utah's VIP Judges. Among these judges were First Lady Mary Kaye Huntsman, Congressman Jim Matheson, University of Utah President Michael K. Young and Judge Andrew Valdez. The panel had the difficult task of selecting a boy and girl national finalist along with runners up.

Utah's first place winners will participate with other National Finalists at the *Do the Write Thing* National Recognition Ceremony in Washington DC this July. Finalists are scheduled to meet with members of Congress to discuss the problem of youth violence. They will also attend a reception hosted by the Ambassador to the United States for the State of Kuwait. A book containing the student's writings will be placed in the Library of Congress.

Congratulations to all students that took the Challenge to do something about youth violence!

UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO  
**Do the Write Thing**

# *National Finalists*

*Erika Larsen*

*8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Dixie Middle School  
Teacher, Chris Cannon*

*Jacques Revia*

*8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Highland Middle School  
Teacher, Kim Irvine*

Erika Larsen • 8th Grade  
Dixie Middle School • Teacher, Chris Cannon

## Youth Violence

I stand and watch  
like a face in the crowd  
my mind oblivious  
to the voices so loud

I do nothing at all  
just watch and wait  
as one falls to the ground  
now potential bait

For others to pick on  
and brutally tease  
while I watch him crack  
and fall to his knees

I could have done something  
put an end to this game  
but instead I just stood  
as this boy suffered in pain

Has anyone ever told you that you were unwanted, stupid, or anything else along those lines? If you have heard words like these directed at you then you have been a victim of youth violence. Youth violence can be as simple as name calling but can be as extreme as murder or abuse. People don't realize the meaning one simple word can have, if it is use in the wrong context.

Causes of youth violence are spread across a wide variety of reasons. It could start as young as two or three years of age. Someone could live in an abusive home and even though they may think it is wrong, they might end up being abusive themselves. People learn from example, and when someone is shown a bad example, they tend to follow. If someone gets angry they may feel that they want to take their problems out on someone else. They might want to make someone else feel as pained as they feel. Media plays a large role in youth violence. By the time a person has reached the age of eleven, he/she has witnessed, on average, 8,000 murders and over 100,000 other acts of violence on television.

The first step in overcoming youth violence is identifying and understanding the risk factors. To do this, they should think of their status in all of the following areas: Individual, Family, Peer/School, and Neighborhood/Community. Next is to find the problem area, person, or thing. They should think of what has been making them mad, sad, or unwanted. Next, the victim, a parent, or other authority figure should invite the problem person and his/her parents to a conference/meeting. In the event at which the problem is an adult or not a person at all, they should go to a counselor and talk it all out with them. Hopefully this should solve the problem(s). If not, then they should see a counselor specialized in Youth Violence.

Seeing someone being bullied and not reporting it or stopping it, is just as bad as actually bullying someone. I have witnessed people bullying other people (usually younger

kids), seen fights, and have been a victim of bullying. I remember a time when I was about ten years old, I saw one of my good friends bullying a little 6 year old. My friend wasn't really fighting her per say, but she was definitely lowering this little girls self esteem. I am ashamed to say that I didn't step in right away. I watched the whole thing and listened to all of the mean things that my friend called her. I felt really bad, but I was scared that if I told my teacher, my friend would get mad at me. I soon realized it was the price I had to pay for justice. I waited for all of my classmates to leave the room for recess, and then I bravely walked up to the front of the room where the teacher's desk was. I told my teacher the instance I witnessed on the playground earlier that morning. I told her who was doing the bullying and who was receiving the hurtful words that spilled out of my friends mouth.

After school my friend was told to stay for just a few minutes. I was given the option to stay, so I stayed. My teacher had me explain to my dear friend how I felt when I saw what she had done. I also explained how I told my teacher what happened. After I was done, my teacher had one more surprise up her sleeve. She walked over to the door, opened it and led the bullied little girl and what appeared to be her mother to the front of the room where my friend I were standing. My teacher explained to this little girl's mom that my friend had bullied her daughter and that I had had courage enough to tell her about it. At that point the little girl leapt into my arms and gave me a big hug. I realized then, that just reporting a bully case to a responsible adult can mean the world to certain people.

In 2002, over 877,700 people ages 10-24 we injured from violent acts. Out of those 877,700 people 1 in 13 needed hospitalization. On average, 15 kids ages 10-24 died a day in the year 2001. Between 1994 and 1999, 172 students age 5-18 were killed at school activities or on or near school grounds. In a survey, 17% of students confessed to carrying a weapon such as a gun, club, or knife on one or more days in the total 30 days before the survey. In a nationwide survey, 33% of students reported being in a physical fight at least once on the 12 months before the survey took place. A study of 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders showed that 25% had been victims of dating violence. A survey showed that 9% of students had been hit slapped or physically hurt by their boyfriend or girlfriend in the 12 months prior to the survey.

Youth violence is everywhere. Millions have been affected by it and millions still are. If someone feels that they can stop a violent act themselves without getting hurt, they should do so. If they believe the situation is out of their hands, they should report it. The victims of violent acts don't deserve it, and the people using violence don't deserve to get away with it.

Jacques Reviea • 8th Grade  
Highland Middle School • Teacher, Kim Irvine

Violence, obviously, is bred from anger, hatred, and/or pain. All of these emotions are complicated and hard to explain. I really hate to get on this subject even though it put me in a better place. Before and during the period when violence was happening in my parent's house, I was getting C's, D's and F's. Now, I'm getting A's and A-'s and 90 & 100% percent attendance. Now I have ambitions and goals.

Before I came to live with my grandparents I was headed towards gangs, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and a lot of other things that would have ruined my life at an early age. Presently, my goals are to attend college or join the Navy SEALs or Army Rangers. I plan to achieve many things in my life.

Violence has affected me in many minor ways, but on a major note, it helped me to realize that violence is wrong and youth violence, specifically, is unnecessary, life altering and nearly unpredictable.

The reason for youth violence has been questionable for a very long time. People have assumed it; tried to poll it, researched it, and even just guessed at it. What you are about to read is merely the uninformed opinion of a 13 year old kid. But, being that I'm from the group that this kind of thing obviously originates, it should be somewhat valid. People say that the cause of violence is T.V., video games, angry music, violent movies, etc. But, I happen to be a little bit associated with all of them and none of them have affected me at all. I don't feel more violent after watching T.V. or playing a first person shooter game. I don't want to shoot, strangle or maim anyone after watching an action movie. No, I'll tell you what I think happens, what I think causes teens to suddenly become violent with rage or hate is growing up in a violent situation or being exposed to

violence regularly. To every day see a loved one get hurt or to always, every day get picked on by harassers who have nothing better to do than hurt people, trying to look “cool.” Cool. What a laughable concept. By whose standards is someone cool or not? What gives one person the right to say someone else is “lame” or “stupid”? By whose standards are people judged as a nerd or a geek whereas, others are looked up at by all?

The only kind of violence that has ever made me mad or made my attitude change was violence directed at me, or someone I love. Then I wanted to do whatever I could do to stop whoever it was that was threatening my family. And there I was a little 7-year-old hero hoping I was ready for battle, ready to slay the dragon and vanquish the evil that stood before me. It was a real good thing that someone was always there to keep this little hero from getting dusted. Otherwise, things probably wouldn't have turned out the same as they are now.

I seriously think that the thing that drives people the most is a violent, and no doubt, turbulent past. Although this sort of thing can be extremely hard to deal with, that does not make it okay in any sense-of-the-word. I know that, arguably, having a life completely exposed to violent material can and most likely will, alter your frame of mind. However, I do not think that is the sole cause of cause of it nor, do I think that a troubled past is an even one-fourth relevant explanation for such brutal acts as Columbine or any other senseless acts of violence.

Violence isn't something that can be easily taken care of or else we would have solved, and rid society of it a long time ago. But, we have to do something about it, obviously. I know that individuals can do their part in the ongoing prevention of violence.

However, we as a society need to stand up and help the youth of our great nation to be in a better environment. So go ahead, when you see a neighbor kid experiencing domestic violence in their home, tell someone. Let someone know because it is your business. Because that poor distressed child with the dirt on their face and the blood in their hair might later assault and kill others. So, you've done nothing wrong in turning in your neighbors, friends, and even your family if need be. If there is domestic violence there could be youth violence later. As for me, if I hear neighbors screaming, if I see a gun in a locker, I'm going to speak up and tell someone. And on a personal note if I ever see someone hit my mom again, I will personally try to stop it the best I can without using violence.

So this is what we can do to prevent violence, as well as my idea of what causes violence, and how it has affected me.

(Initially I wasn't going to write a poem at all, but I just put pencil to paper and the following poem flowed out in the form of a descriptive, partial metaphor.)

## Little Hero

A boy stands alone in a world deformed, stands to fight a known evil to stop a monster's wrath, to prevent a woman's scream. He stands ready or so it seems, sword unsheathed, eyes sore with tears, ears burning with the sound of two clashing worlds. A boy of the clouds, of happy times, and smiles, turns to a young warrior unaware of the beating he would receive. A shape, a shadow, a hand unwanted, held his fury in the grasp of two creaky doors. An unknown and unwelcome peril crawls over and stops a boy from falling, falling to the floor as a beaten mess, a disgraced figure fallen from his seat high in the stars, his dignity in tatters, his mind a chaotic mess. A quarrel unbeknownst to the young minds of a home, now broken. Words not said, minds unspoken. A gray haze of hurt and tears engulfs them all. Not a thought expressed nor soul overturned. A man upset, rises to the unspoken, desolate, and yet desperate calls of a perilous quest and slays the beast's ego making him a twisted and empty corpse. Were this warrior to see you now, were he to here your violent and threatening voice, he would exact his revenge and silence the boasts of a man who hit a beautiful woman and broke a family for several years. This now improved warrior would strike for all he went through and saw, a ravaged mind, frozen like a winter garden, cold and empty till spring's warm voice lifts his spirits. He would strike for a woman now frozen in the quick sands of time.

He would strike for love.

By

Jacques Reviea

UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO  
**Do the Write Thing**

*Runners Up*

*Name Withheld by Request*  
8<sup>th</sup> Grade

*Samuel Allred*  
7<sup>th</sup> Grade, Ephraim Middle School  
Teacher, Barbara Wintch

Name Withheld by Request • 8th Grade

## **Swept under....**

My eyes burned with the scenes before me, my nose filled with the hot tang of indignity. Standing only with a fallen heart, the father I had just lost stood before me, he was no longer my father, shaking I stand between him and the rest. I won't let it happen again, that very day he became my deepest enemy. His foul ways torment souls, the harm he conjures goes too far into mind and body to ever be repaired; he becomes supreme, and he casts his shadow on the very hearts that love him. I am not one of those hearts. I won't let it happen again, with every pulsing vein, fidgeting muscle, his jaw clenches you see it in his eyes, when it comes I'll be there, standing over the ones I love, a martyr for the less brave, it may be my end, it may not, but I will not bow before the one who holds the innocence of a child in his hand flaunting it with arrogance. You may often find a boy laying on the couch that no one is suppose to sit on in almost full fledged darkness left there to be ignored, only I can't standing in the kitchen I hear bangs, slams, screams that make your ears ring and, Oh man! No, no don't, here they come, here they come! Get off me, get off of me!! Only there is nothing on him to begin with. His eyes soft with innocence, and torn with panic, but as I see into those eyes that innocence has become more and more distant, and the dread resides. Where is the laughter that used to come from the walls over? All that I hear is the ranting of a lost boy, the tears that fall upon the bruised and weary heart after the storm. Where is the light air, where is the joy of love? It lay smothered under the fist of the storm cloud. When will there be the break of a new

dawn? All I see up ahead is the on going of total blackness. Huddled in a small corner hides the mother of his children, slumped into deep depression she relies on pills to take her through her day, that woman is in so many shadows, resorting to abuse to punish the every day sins of naive minds; sins that every heart makes, but how can the young minded comprehend that the mistakes they make are spilt milk, but that their keepers cannot handle themselves as well as the situation? Marks show upon the supple skin of minors, a house lay in shambles; if they could only see what their cruel retribution does to the young, how it affects the very soul, the way it turns our lives against us, making a heavy chain that wraps its self around our minds limiting our chances of success, with every blow there is added another link to that chain, and before long we are barbarians to our own children. We will do the only thing we know how. After all how can we as the youth stand up for what we know is right if there are not those to help us? If we don't stop the anger, the pure malevolence of violence and abuse for the young now, then when we grow up it will be unadulterated devastation. We must act now, put an end to screaming, and hitting to sort out our problems, because all it does is put a shroud of disturbance in the way of the peace. I mean what I say when I speak of the futile efforts of those around the battle field, all that happens is the wounded sweep up their feelings, and scrapes then hide them under the beds of all the children. My soul was swept up long ago, I am still being hurt to this day and I am lucky enough to have a safe refuge outside my father's home, my mother gave me the chance of healing, but I often think of all the children that don't have that asset, every other weekend I see some of the people that mean so much to me, my little brother and sister are living in a place built on the thought that there is no value in love. They will grow to be just as merciless as they have been treated. There is

no hope for tomorrow if we don't look under the beds of the children today, it will be tough, but if we all care enough, what has been swept under can be flushed out and maybe even healed. It is my promise to you that if we stop closing our eyes to the real issues of violence it will open the ways for a far better world.

Samuel Allred • 7th Grade  
Ephraim Middle School • Teacher, Barbara Winch

I wonder sometimes if things would have been different if they had left my brother alone. Everyone expects to have trouble with school. Most kids worry about grades and how many friends they'll have. For my older brother Andrew it was much worse. Violence created in the schools changed my brother's life forever. This is my brother's true story.

In kindergarten the teacher said he couldn't learn, he had no friends and no social skills. So they moved his desk to the back of the room where they would not have to work with him. The teachers let him color alone all day. His classmates no longer ignored him but began to push him down, hit him and call him names because he was different. Andrew was not really so different, he learned differently and was quiet. He could not understand why the other kids wouldn't play with him. It would not be uncommon to find Andrew curled up in a ball on the floor or in the lunch line trying to make the kids leave him alone.

Andrew had a lot of sisters and all three of them went to the same school. All of them helped Andrew when ever they could. His younger sister, Amber would even try to beat up the bullies that picked on Andrew. The teasing still went on.

By third grade violence became even more real for my brother. One day he was handcuffed by another student that had brought his grandfather's police handcuffs to school. Andrew thought, for the first time, he had made friends to play with but it was a vicious lie. As soon he was handcuffed with his hands behind his back, they launched into a series of cruel jokes. Thrown to the ground my brother suffered blow after blow

around the head and back. Several boys kicked him so hard he couldn't breathe. He withdrew further and further into himself.

By 4th grade he still could not read, he would not speak and seldom played with other kids. The school put in a class that was tailored for the handicapped and backward learners unfortunately they were mostly bullies. Now he spent a lot of his time under his desk.

If you think one teacher can't make a difference, then you will not believe my brother's story. In the sixth grade Andrew was moved into Mrs. Mitchell's class away from the bullies that tormented him. Mrs. Mitchell's class was for advanced learners and only those who could keep up and do excellent work were allowed in. Andrew began to thrive. Within one year he was scoring in the top ten percent in math and science on the national tests and jumped to a 12th grade reading level. He found a love, reading. With his glasses and his book in his pocket became known as "grandpa". Andrew loved this new attention and began studying all the sciences.

I wish I could end his story with a happy ending but Andrews's life was anything but happy. By middle school Andrew was being tormented again and he began to withdraw. One violent afternoon, like so many of Andrew's days, the kids followed him home taunting and yelling at him. He hastened his step but since he kept his trumpet and his books in his two-wheeled book cart that slowed him down, the bullies caught up. His book cart was thrown down a hill and they pushed Andrew tumbling after. Bruised cut and cart broken Andrew made it home. The next day his problems started over again.

The teachers began saying that Andrew needed to stick up for himself and started to call him an "odd duck." This gave the bullies an excuse to hurt him even more.

By 8<sup>th</sup> grade Andrew started to feel the effects of living such a violent and lonely life. He was hospitalized for seeing in his mind violent creatures that would try to attack him and a man in black coat that continually followed him. He began living in fear for his life.

In high school the medications could not control the violent things he was seeing. So Andrew was hospitalized again. Even the brief times that he was not in the hospital, he was on so many medicines he would fall out of his chair at school. The teachers became frustrated and put his chair in the hall for they didn't want him to disrupt their class. The other students began pushing him into walls and lockers. Andrew had to finish high school at home alone over the internet.

So if you think that violence in the schools only exists in the big cities you are wrong. Violence exists in even small places like Sanpete County. Violence stole my brother's friends and wonderful experiences he would have had in school and changed his life forever.

UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO  
**Do the Write Thing**

# *State Finalists*

*Clinton Appleton*

8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Focus Provo School District  
Teacher, Cheryl Thompson

*Ilona Flint*

8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Farrer Middle School  
Teacher, Andrea Villegas

*Joseph Beutler*

8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Snow Canyon Middle School  
Teacher, Peggy Jardine

*Mariska Jones*

8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Highland Middle School  
Teacher, Kim Irvine

*Michael Brey*

8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Dixie Middle School  
Teacher, Chris Cannon

*Chris Lasater*

8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Dixie Middle School  
Teacher, Chris Cannon

*Jordan Browning*

8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Dixie Middle School  
Teacher, Chris Cannon

*Shauna Rothenberg*

8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Focus Provo School District  
Teacher, Cheryl Thompson

Clinton Appleton • 8th Grade  
Focus Provo School District • Teacher, Cheryl Thompson

Hi, my name is C.J. Appleton. I am going to tell you about why VIOLENCE and Drugs are bad and how I am going to help get rid of them for good, but at least I will do my best to reduce it.

I have had violence in my life and it has affected me because I was jumped by a gang. I was walking down the sidewalk when I was jumped from all sides. In this incident, there were five guys against one. They punched me and I tried to fight back. After they had fought with me, they ran to try not to be caught. I went home and went to bed. The next morning I woke up with a black eye and popped blood vessels in my eye. This has been one affect of violence in my life. I did not feel very good after they jumped me I just wanted to go do it right back. I didn't because all it would do is happen over and over again. See that is what people don't know how gangs work and that is what people need to get through their head. Gangs do work like that it isn't right and so I just decided to stop the violence before it got any worse I don't like to see any body else get hurt.

I want to tell you about violence. Violence is a strong word you don't have to be hitting somebody to be violent. Violence consists of many things like grabbing, yelling, and fighting. Mostly people who are violent either fight or hit somebody. Now I live in Utah, but there is still violence out here. It doesn't matter what anybody says about Utah. Some people might think that there is no violence in Utah, but there is. Violence doesn't do anybody any good; all it does is hurts people physically, and even sometimes hurts them mentally and emotionally. There is no use for violence if all it does is hurts people. Now I admit I will play fight with friends and family but nobody gets hurt. When the person, or myself that I am play fighting with does get hurt is not intentionally done. It is always an accident. I am going to do my part to keep the violence down, even if I am just hors playing. If I do see a fight going on, I will try my hardest to stop it. I don't know what else to say about violence, so now we will move onto why drugs are bad.

Well just because you hear to word drugs doesn't necessarily mean that they are talking about cigarettes. I

could have a few kinds of drugs that don't do any good for the body like marijuana, methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, and ecstasy. Now none of these drugs are good for the body they all ruin brain cells and make blood clots in your brain. Some make you stay up for days and some just make you tired. All they do is make you dumber by the second. They don't help you do anything, and they sure as heck don't do anything good for our life, or body. People who do it, sell it, or especially even make it have problems. Most people want to have a family that they can see everyday, not only when they come to visit you at jail. If I ever meet people that do drugs, and they want to be my friend I would say quit the drugs get a life, and then maybe we could hang out, but only if you quit the drugs and get a life going for yourself. I will do anything except do drugs. I will not do drugs for anyone. I don't want to waste my life away for drugs, and not have a family, a home, or clothes on my back I will not do it. I want a job and I want a nice, caring and loving family. I will not allow any kind of drug or alcohol in my house I will not. If people I think or thought were my friends brought drugs into my house I would kick them out and they would not be allowed back in. Even if they quit doing drugs and alcoholic beverages. Well this is all I have to say about drugs and violence. Just remember avoid violence and don't do any drugs.

Sincerely,

C. J. Appleton

Joseph Beutler • 8th Grade  
Snow Canyon Middle School • Teacher, Peggy Jardine

## **Violence in Schools: An Ongoing Problem**

Homicide is the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24. This is an extremely alarming statistic. The root causes of homicide are drugs, gang violence, and parental negligence. The same factors which contribute to the homicides, contribute to violence at school. These problems need to be recognized and identified before they can be solved. Violence can only be stopped if it is confronted at its source.

One contributing factor to violence among children is drug usage at increasingly younger ages. Illegal drug use is expensive, and many addicts resort to violence and crime to feed their habits. In addition, drug usage inhibits rational thinking, reduces inhibitions, and results in violent behavior. Over 85% of violent crimes committed are committed under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Whenever drug use is mentioned, marijuana and cocaine come to mind first. But, other drugs, such as steroids, are often over-looked, even though they cause many problems. Steroid use, which used to be confined to professional sports, has now become rampant among college and high school athletes. Many athletes believe that they cannot reach a high level of success without using steroids. Can society blame them? Often people they look to as role models use steroids, so young athletes question why it isn't okay for them to use them as well. Youth can only know what it is exposed to. When children are aware that many professional athletes use steroids to enhance performance, they become convinced that the only way to succeed in athletics is to use performance enhancing drugs, too.

Although steroids help increase strength and muscle mass, they also cause hair-trigger tempers. Patrick, formerly a respected high school athlete, began using steroids while in high school. His whole life he dreamed of playing football in college. He was recruited by a top Division 1 football team. Only a few weeks before he was to realize his dream of playing collegiate ball, Patrick was involved in a violent incident. After being upset by a 17 year old peer at a party, Patrick, himself 18, left the party and returned minutes later with a baseball bat. He hit the other youth over the head with the bat. His victim suffered a concussion and broken skull. Patrick was charged as an adult, convicted of felony assault and battery, and sentenced to prison. His dream was in tatters; all because of a fit of ungovernable rage induced by steroid use.

Another factor that contributes to school violence is a lack of parental involvement with children. When love is lacking in his/her home, in order to have a sense of belonging in his/her life, a child may resort to joining a gang. When an individual joins a gang, he/she is "jumped in," which means that the gang will beat the new member long enough and hard enough that he will need to spend anywhere from one week to a month in the hospital to recover. This is considered an initiation. The reason the gang employs this type of ritual is to toughen its new member. The beating causes so much nerve damage to the victim, that many of his/ her nerves are damaged so badly that he/she is no longer as sensitive to pain. An alternate ritual, for prospective female members is often a night of gang rape. When a member wants to leave a gang, he/she is "jumped out" before he is allowed to leave the gang. When this happens, the member who is attempting to sever his ties with the gang is beaten nearly to death. Why would anyone want to be

“jumped out?” If they don’t submit to this ritual, they are in a sense “AWOL” from the gang, and other gang members will hunt them down and kill them.

In many communities there is a serious problem with drug usage among students in school. School administrators interviewing students caught with drugs often find that many of them were obtaining the illegal substances from their very own parents! Some of the kids caught using drugs didn’t even realize that possession and use of drugs was against the law. If parents themselves abuse drugs and condone their children’s drug usage, the behavior is difficult and often impossible for authorities to stop, and will likely continue on a large scale. For many people it may take only one or two experiments with drug usage to become physically and emotionally dependant on these harmful chemicals.

Another great tragedy that contributes to violence in our society today is the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of children in their own homes. This abuse causes them to act out and engage in aggressive behavior towards others. Perhaps if a child’s first exposure to violence didn’t occur in his/her own home, violent behavior among children would not be as prevalent as it is in school today. Communities need to provide counseling to help abused and neglected children deal with inner hostility and aggression. Counseling for parents to help them to deal with their own hostile and aggressive feelings needs to be provided as well. Many of today’s abusive parents were themselves abused as children.

Another contributing factor to violence among children is the “Latch Key” syndrome. Unfortunately, since two incomes are required in most households in our society today, many children return home from school to empty houses. No one in authority is there to provide guidance. No one is available to drive them to after-school

extra-curricular activities, which would give them an outlet to release energy and channel aggression in a controlled environment.

Setting up community based programs held at school after school hours to involve unsupervised children would help violence among children to decrease. Participating in organized after school athletic programs would keep children occupied and out of trouble. Because of a lack in funding, schools in Albuquerque, New Mexico eliminated junior high school athletics. Within a very short period of time juvenile crime increased, crime involving younger and younger children. The community decided that the cost of not providing the after school programs for junior high students was greater than the cost of providing the programs and reinstated junior high sports. Following the restitution of the sports programs, crime involving juveniles decreased.

The main causes of violence among children in schools are drugs, gangs, and lack of parental supervision and involvement. Until changes are implemented, the problem of violence among children will never abate. Society must act to prevent its most vulnerable members from falling into destructive lifestyle patterns. As Helen Keller said, "Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much." We must first target these issues, then work together to try to control them.

Michael Brey • 8th Grade  
Dixie Middle School • Teacher, Chris Cannon

### **Youth Violence Essay**

Youth Violence is a plague that affects teenagers everyday. It affects us at home, at school, and on television. It manifests itself in a variety of different forms that allows it to creep into our lives so subtly that it begins to become commonplace and acceptable in our culture.

Violence has been a part of my life for many years and I have experienced it in many different ways. I have had my share of fights with a bully or tormentor of some kind. Fighting had, I admit, became my way of solving my problems with those people, but now no longer is. I was encouraged to fight many times by adults in my life as a way to confront my tormentor, but it never did fix my problem. It only dragged out the problem and made my relations with that person worse.

I also witness bullying of students on a regular basis and I always try to help the victim with his problem because of my experience with bullying in the past.

Today, youth violence is found on television and movies everyday, and seems to be encouraged by the media. The media projects an image that seems to promote violence as a better way to solve your problems than solving your problems with more peaceful methods. Bullying is often portrayed on children's television and the victim of the bullying is more than not seen fighting as way to confront his foe. This exposes an image of a so called acceptable violence to children at a very young age and it teaches them negative forms of resolution.

In some cases, children and teenagers witness violence at home in the form of spousal abuse between their parents. They might also experience violence in the form of child abuse. This behavior at home becomes a learned way to resolve conflict and it becomes a never ending cycle of continued violence for generations to come.

With all these influences around the youth of today, it seems nearly impossible to think that they can curve their destructive cycles into positive ones. I suggest, as one way to help solve violence, that we establish character education programs in all of our schools. Our school has a fantastic character education program called A.S.P.I.R.E. (A Success Program In Reaching Excellence) that has helped stop a lot of conflicts around our school since it has been established and it also has taught the students life skills that will help them throughout their life. It is just a 15 minute class between second and third period, but it has immensely helped the students in solving their problems.

Another way that we can help stop youth violence is by teaching youth to exercise my three C's: Control, Compromise, and Compassion. If we exercise Control in our dealings with our enemies we will be less likely to spark conflict with our words or with our actions. If we exercise Compromise, we can come up with peaceful resolutions that make both parties can be content with. Finally, if we use Compassion with the person or persons involved, we will be less likely to harbor angry and violent feelings towards them, therefore averting a violent confrontation.

I have an a optimistic view that in the future will be able to rid our culture and lives of violence and anger if we come together as a society and adopt these strategies. Youth violence is preventable. The key to fixing it is my three C's; Control, Compromise, and Compassion.

Jordan Browning • 8th Grade  
Dixie Middle School • Teacher, Chris Cannon

# Youth Violence

You tore away my dignity,  
You put me in so much pain,  
You made it so I cry at night,  
Wishing it could change.  
But I know that this is something that will never go away,  
It hurts to know I trusted you with all my heart,  
But you just took that trust and ripped it apart,  
I will never forgive you for all the fear you put me through,  
But now its over and there's nothing I can do,  
For so long I felt it was my fault,  
But now I realize I need to get it through my head,  
It is only you at fault, my self-confidence is dead.  
You'll always be in my dreams,  
I just wish that you were gone,  
I just hope that you realize what you did to me was wrong!

Youth Violence isn't something uncommon but a big problem.  
The rest of the people in this country and I have all seen many  
different acts of violence whether it's on TV or in our neighborhoods, or  
even in our own homes.

Most of us have all been involved in an act of violence.

*Violence isn't something that you can be born with its something that you learn from your surroundings such as; your friends, family, and the all around environment that you grew up in.*

*There's so many different kinds of violence such as; verbal violence, physical violence, sexual violence, and many others that we have all witnessed and the more we see the more it gets into our minds and builds up our own anger which can cause us to be violent!*

*But there are so many ways to get help and it's very important that we do whatever we can do to help ourselves, and others around us!*

*Violence has deeply affected me in so many ways, such as getting along with others. Because of what I have seen and experienced has made me so I have problems with liking, trusting, and getting to know people. Violence has also affected me in how safe I feel on the streets, in the mall, even in my own home. It has made me such an angry person.*

*I believe there is so much we can all do about youth violence. If we just all tried our very hardest, there could be a lot less violence and a much safer community. People think counseling is a waste of time and it is pointless, but talking to a counselor can really help. I went to a counseling group for anger about two years ago and it has changed my life in so many ways. I have learned to control my anger a lot better! Many people think if you are found participating in a violent act you are a bad person, but you are really not; what you are doing is bad, but it can be helped. Sometimes when someone takes you to a point you let everything go and the results are not always that great, but it is also not completely your fault. Yes it is up to you to get help or hold back, but your environment makes a person violent and it cannot always be stopped. It is worth a try for ourselves, our family, our friends, our peers, and the children of our world today, because we are teaching them just as we were taught. We need to make their childhoods less violent so our future will be less violent.*

Ilona Flint • 8th Grade  
Farrer Middle School • Teacher, Andrea Villegas

## Reaching Out

Screaming, blood splattering everywhere, and child sitting in the corner crying. I'm sure you've heard a lot of these heartbreaking stories on the news, yet have you really taken the time to understand the suffering these people go through? I happened to have a friend who lived in an abusive family. I am hoping to raise your awareness of abuse and violence and explain to you what they mean to me.

My friend would share all of her joys and sorrows with me. She recounts crying herself to sleep every night with yelling in the background. She so desperately wanted to get out but the thought of leaving her eight year old sister made her stay. At the same time she didn't want her sister living in a horrid environment. As I was sitting in my desk at lunchtime I was called down to the office. There I learned that my friend committed suicide. It makes me sick that her parents didn't realize how much of an input their abuse had in their precious daughter's life.

My peer chose a ghastly yet simple way out of her misery. It doesn't always end this way. Many offenders were abused in their childhood. Which means that if abuse is kept a taboo it is likely to get passed on or will effect the psychological state of the victim. Abuse is classified into 4 categories physical, sexual, emotional abuse, and neglect.

Physical abuse is probably the most obvious form of abuse. It involves hitting, slapping, beating, burning, choking, or any kind of physical contact that leaves a mark or significant pain. Sexual abuse is any unwanted sexual contact. Emotional abuse is when a peer/relative purposely brings down your self-esteem. Lastly, neglect is when a parent doesn't provide enough emotional support or necessities. Of course abuse just doesn't happen at home, there is also bullying, which occurs in peer groups.

Statistics show that in the year 2000, 879,000 children were victims of maltreatment. (Source: US Dept of Health and Human Services)

Outrageously, in 2000, 67% of victims of sexual assaults were juveniles. (Source: BJS) Doesn't that make you feel horrible? Doesn't that make you want to do something about this monstrous epidemic raging in our communities? Well, you can! Now that should make you feel great! To list some of the many things you can do is to start a community watch program, report suspicious activity, speak out against this crime, or just simply become a mentor. That's all it takes for you to make a difference.

To me violence is the most hurtful way of expressing your anger and it has such great consequences. Unluckily, my friend wasn't one of the shockingly 39 million living victims in the US. There is much you can do to stop violence, why wait? I have gained much knowledge from my friend's death and I hope I've passed on some of my wisdom to you.

Mariska Jones • 8th Grade  
Highland Middle School • Teacher, Kim Irvine

## An Innocence Lost

An innocent child,  
No fear does she feel.  
She thinks the world is perfect.  
She thinks her life is paradisiacal.  
No flaws. Nothing but jubilation  
Fills the life of the young and hopeful child.  
Until a day, like any day,  
The day that hides a threatening secret.  
An unknown planning, no other human knows,  
A fearful hate to grow to action.  
A patient father waits for his son,  
Not knowing the jeopardy he is in.  
The son is coming, anger has filled his body.  
Not knowing what else to do,  
The troubled teenager grasps his weapon.  
He walks into the house,  
All he can think is how enraged he is,  
How much he wants to get vengeance.  
He cannot concentrate on the consequences,  
He is too infuriated to analyze this situation.

Without thinking, he clutches his gun.  
His father has no time to react,  
This was an unexpected attack.  
The shot is so powerful,  
It is heard for miles.  
All who have heard this cacophony,  
Fear and confusion run through their minds.  
Another shot is heard,  
Everyone rushes where two bodies lie.  
One was killed from hate,  
One from guilt.  
Two bodies, lying side by side,  
two lives, taken in a few short minutes.  
A child hides, not far from this home,  
The innocence has been lost,  
the real world has consumed this child.  
No more will this child be fearless,  
the two shots have affected her for life.

Although this particular act of violence has not affected me directly, it has affected my life, as well as others, I am sure. Violence is a chain of hate. It is passed on through people by actions and words. If someone hurts another, they will most likely take out what they feel on others. Violence is an ugly thing that consumes the world into a deep and dark oblivion. The only way to stop violence is to stand up against it. If you are a victim of hate, do not pass it on. Control yourself and stop the chain. You never will know how many people you will affect.

The causes of violence are not clear. No one knows what was going through that kid's head while he pulled the trigger. Maybe he was angry, maybe he was overwhelmed. No other living being will ever know. His life no longer exists; he can not express how he was feeling.

The boy that shot his father and himself had no idea that it would affect me. He didn't even know who I was, just a neighbor kid. But it has affected my life, and I will never forget what happened. If he had only controlled his feelings, and thought about what he was doing, the terrible thing that happened would not have happened, and two lives would have been saved.

## The Childhood Memory

Like a child, I cry again,  
The shot's been heard, it echoes in my mind  
What innocent blood has been taken?  
What credulous blood stains the floor?  
I hear the sirens, rushing to help.  
But they can do no more, the life is gone.  
They cannot be saved now,  
No power can bring them back to you.  
No more do they live, you will never see them again.  
Not a single breath will they take from the air.  
Never again.  
Never again will they walk.  
Never again will they talk.  
Never again will they feel your embrace.  
Never again will you see their smile.  
Only shock has been painted on their face,  
that someone they loved could do this,  
that someone they raised could hurt like this.  
Never again will they wonder,

For all has been lost to the hate of another.

The guilt is too much,

only his own life remains, the only thing left.

A second shot is heard,

his own life is no more.

My childhood memory haunts, following me, endlessly.

Will that ever happen to me?

I am afraid when I hear the deafening blare of the sirens.

I am afraid when I hear the sudden shot ring through the silence.

The fear will linger forever.

It will never fade from my mind.

I will never forget.

Will my memory become alive again?

To take more innocent life?

Like a child, I cry again.

Chris Lasater • 8th Grade  
Dixie Middle School • Teacher, Chris Cannon

Violence in schools is something that occurs daily. Violence occurs in many forms, such as physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse or harassment, or prejudice of races or religions, etc. In this paper I will tell you how violence has affected my life, what I can do about it, and what causes youth violence.

Youth violence has affected my life in many different ways. When I am at school, I witness students swearing at each other, hitting each other, and students ridiculing each other through name calling, taunting, and disrespecting in general. One of the worst situations I have seen, was when a boy went up to a girl and grabbed her butt. I have also seen boys going up to other boys and pulling down on their backpacks making a sexual gesture. It just makes you sick, when you see a kid being publicly embarrassed. School is supposed to be a safe place. I don't always feel safe when I see these kinds of things going on around me. I also feel like it is almost impossible to go anywhere and not see some kind of violence occurring.

Just as there are many different kinds of violence, there are also many different causes. One of the things that I think has a profound effect on youth violence is television, video games, and music. The American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, and the Center for Disease Control have done violence studies and discovered that by age 18, children have witnessed 200,000 acts of violence on television, including 18,000 simulated murders. Many popular and best selling video games today, are filled with violence, blood, gore, disrespect for people, and rules of society. They seem to celebrate violence and the destruction of all that is good and right. Music is another area that causes violence. Music is an important part of most teenagers. Rap music, punk rock, heavy metal, are all types of music that encourage violence in all forms.

There are many fun and healthy activities that have value and encourage positive behavior and can help prevent violence. I believe that parents have a huge part to play in how a child handles his anger. If parents let their child listen to violent music, watch violent shows, play violent video games, and respond to situations in an inappropriate manner, then the parents are not showing their children proper ways to channel their anger. I think that parents and kids should do things together as a family. Kids should be involved in sports or other healthy physical activities. Kids should be involved in activities like scouting, or other activities that allow

them to express themselves and achieve. If all kids were busy doing healthy, worthwhile activities, they would tend to be less violent.

Shauna Rothenberg • 8th Grade  
Focus Provo School District • Teacher, Cheryl Thompson

## Do the Write Thing

From ages four to thirteen violence was a routine throughout my life. I would wake up in the mornings to my Biological parents fighting and throwing things at each other. My brothers would already be a wake and I would have to keep them in their closet until I got help from our next-door neighbor. After my parents were done fighting my mom would take me to school and drop off my brothers at daycare. At school, people would annoy me so I would hit them and spit on them. I didn't know any other way to handle the situations I was put in besides using violence. Teachers later on became concerned because my grades were horrible along with my behavior. A couple of months later my brothers and I were taken away, and put into foster care. We were returned to our parents later on because they had gotten help. After a few weeks of being home, the fighting continued, I didn't report the fighting because I was afraid of losing my family. One night I decided to report the fighting because my dad had threatened my younger brother with a knife. After that night we were taken away forever, my brothers and I were placed together in a healthier family.

The violence however was still stuck in my life because of me. I still had no clue on how to control my anger and so I would continue to fight at my schools and at home. My adoptive mom took me to therapy but it was too late, I had already made my self believe that nothing was wrong with me. Finally, my mom placed me into a group home so that I could get the help that I needed. Now that I have been in a group home, I have learned how to control my anger and recognize it. I can express my self in other appropriate ways other than using violence. My family members and friends think that I have become a better person.

From past experience, I have observed three things that I think cause violence: past experiences at home, substituting anger for alcohol and drugs, and the media. At home, if your parents handled their anger with violence you grow up learning how to handle your anger the same way. In addition, when you try to quit using alcohol and drugs you replace them with anger. That anger can lead to violence if you're not getting the proper care to deal with addiction. Lastly, by watching television and movies people get the idea that violence is the way to handle your anger, because of all of the violence that is being watched.

I think that we can prevent more than half the violence in the world by:

**Banding alcohol and cigarettes, being more careful on what you watch on television and in movies, getting help by a professional so that you can learn how to control your anger in appropriate ways, and walking away from violence. These things have helped me so if they can help me they can help other people.**

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