

## **Unity at the Lake Essay Writing Contest**

### **How I make a Difference Contest Winners**

#### **Sage Alexander, Grade 12**

Someone born in the United States of America will create thirteen times as much ecological damage in their lives than someone born in Brazil. Annually, a person in the U.S. emits 15.53 metric tons of carbon dioxide. The average American generates 52 tons of garbage by age 75. The difference I make is that I am part of the problem. I am the source of climate change, a part of the destruction of the world we live in. I throw away things with abandon after I am finished with them, I make money for the people who are putting shareholders interest over our future. I am a user of gasoline ripped from the hands of “third world” countries, a passive acceptor of war, and a person driven by consumption. I am the cause of the sixth great extinction. How do I distance myself from a country when we’re creating so much pain and destruction? How can I separate myself from the world I exist in? I am the fine particles of plastic floating in the ocean, the massive expanses of clear cut rainforests, but I am also the 17 year old senior in South Lake Tahoe writing these words. I am the individual who writes about climate change and avoids animal products and loves freely. I encourage student voice for change in the Viking Longship Newspaper. I am the future.

It is too simple and classically American to disregard the ways in which we are pillaging only to emphasize the actions we take that are symbolic. There is a

problem in the way that our culture operates. I must accept the instances where I am the problem before acknowledging the steps I take towards a solution. I intend to steer my life in the direction of making a change in the climate, representing the populations and ecosystems that need help the most. I am going to become a lawyer after studying history and philosophy, and I will be a part of the solution to a problem driven by greed. To oppose this gluttony I must offer solutions that focus on giving away the things Americans are obsessed with. How necessary are the petroleum based products we hoard? We must reevaluate the real cost of items and the infrastructure we are willing to invest in their production. I hope to be the driving force of people who no longer want to allow powerful interests to have absolute control over the place I live. I am the future.

## **How I Make a Difference**

### **Teagan Williamson, Grade 11**

The words “how I make a difference” can be explored by many different thoughts, it is just a matter of who you are. As a student athlete at South Tahoe High, these words have a powerful meaning to me and question me, what have I done in the community and school to make it a better place? Overlooking my three years at this school, I came to a conclusion that sports would have to be the big impact on how I make a difference. However, encouraging younger classmen to join teams, leading them through games, and creating bonds with new teammates, didn’t seem like it was making a difference. The more I contemplated

these words and what they really mean, it became clear to me that showing confidence in who you are and having a positive attitude in everything you do will make a difference to someone in some way. A person with confidence and a positive attitude is a great example of a positive leader. They show determination, concentration, work ethic and joy that will inspire others. Therefore, being a positive leader on the court and field will encourage the younger players to step up and lead their teams. Being a positive leader in the classroom will motivate others to work harder in school. A positive leader will make a difference to the younger kids and people to join more activities and get motivated. Absorbing these words into my own meaning has incorporated me into being a positive leader myself, especially with athletics and schoolwork. By getting good grades and showing hard work in class, I hope to inspire other students to do so as well. This will make a difference in our school because it will start to develop more determination with our students in school work. In athletics, I will continue to encourage students, younger and older, to join sports because it will benefit them with not only a healthy body, but a healthy mental attitude. Athletics will also keep students in the right mindset and not get involved with bad decisions.

Overall, the words “how I make a difference” holds many different and powerful meanings from individuals. Some, much more meaningful than others, but it all comes down to who is trying to make a difference and who isn’t. Therefore, as a student, parent or teacher, we should ask ourselves, how do I make a difference? Whether it’s showing kindness to someone you don’t know, volunteering at the

homeless shelter or even to help walk dogs at a local pound, it will make a difference to people, animals and to you as well. This will shape us into who we become and into a better us, as well as a better community.

## **How I Make a Difference**

### **Haley Lillard, Grade 10**

Snow glistens on the icy shores of a popular town, mixing with the soft chill in the air; as though both are brothers of the same, close-knit, family. Underneath the shimmering slush lay tiny tan rocks, waiting silently for the sun to warm their bodies and soft feet to spread them to new destinations. However, mixed in with the natural beauty of the town is something vile and unnatural, something that inevitably appears without a thought. The beast has come to take over this ecosystem and destroy its blinding grace. It is an abandoned water bottle. To stop this villain from dirtying up the beach placed under Tahoe's care, the children of Upward Bound step up their game and pick up each piece of garbage they can find. However, that is not all they do. I am a member of Upward Bound and have been on many of these volunteer clean-ups. In order to make a visible difference in South Lake Tahoe, I help clean up beaches, cut back invasive species, and go on camping trips to try and learn as much as I can about the world around me. I believe I make a difference by cutting back on as much human waste as I can, which is not nearly as hard as it seems. Although, making a difference doesn't just mean not leaving a harmful imprint. Sometimes, you can make a difference by

smiling at people as you pass them on the street. You can leave tips at local businesses when you have spare change, or compliment a stranger just to make them happier. When someone needs a shoulder to lean on, it isn't much trouble to offer yours. One time when I was waiting in line at Jaliscos, the woman in front of me was wiping at the corners of her eyes, trying to rid them of tears before she ordered. I didn't know why she was crying, nor did I know who she was, but I could tell she was having a bad day. Looking back on all the times where I've cried in a public place, I knew I had to do something to brighten this moment, lest she be lost in thoughts of self-deprecation and loneliness. She probably wouldn't remember it, but if it could distract her for even just a second, I thought it might help. Unable to stop myself or think of a proper compliment, I caught her eye and told her that she looked beautiful today. In an act of pure surprise, she smiled and cried a little bit more, telling me that I did too. "We all look so beautiful, don't we?" She asked rhetorically, turning to the cashier with a giggle to tell him what she intended to buy. I still can feel the warmth in my heart from that memory. To inspire happiness in others is both kind and self-gratifying, and it hardly takes much effort. Making a difference seems like an impossible task reserved for superheroes and people with extraordinary abilities that we couldn't hope to possess. What we as a generation, as a people, don't understand is that we can change the world just by being a decent person. In any way that you try to help this world, you are helping it. No amount of effort is too small or insignificant. If you start recycling, the sour-smelling air could be cleaner. If you started smiling, the

people around would be more at ease. To survive is to adapt, and if we adapt to make this universe a little less hard to live in, then we will be making a difference.

**Marsha (Maddy) Monroe, Grade 9**  
**A Difference Made by Difference**

How do you make a difference? It's a question asked all the time. It's a question that reveals the depth and complexities of a person. When people think about making a difference it's almost always the same. Being nice to the new kids, volunteering, recycling. These things are good, the universe would probably be horrid without them. For a long time I thought the way I changed the world was the same as the activities listed above. These things are good, but they're not how a make a difference.

There was a specific time in my life that allowed me to realize how I make a difference. Up until the fifth grade I went to an extraordinarily small catholic school. Its small size allowed me to connect with classmates and teachers in a way that wasn't possible at bigger schools. Me and my classmates were totally comfortable with each other. Every minute of every day we were unapologetically ourselves, showing each other the weirdest, dorkiest, silliest parts of ourselves. When the school shut down I remember marching into STMS, a school where around eight hundred kids resided, mostly unafraid. The students at STMS were kind, they welcomed me into

their friend with open arms, but they we're nothing like my old classmates. At first I was bewildered, did none of these kids have a dark sense of humor? Did none of these kids like being weird for no reason whatsoever? Finally I figured out why I felt like this, I was one of the only students who wasn't afraid to be 100% themselves. The kids here lived every day in fear that they would be persecuted for who they really are inside. Even though my friends and classmates seemed more reserved and quiet than I was, I stayed true to who I was. I knew that I would never stop being myself.

I wasn't satisfied with me being the only one of my friends who was unapologetically myself. I wanted my friends to have that same freedom I had. I wanted them to live everyday unafraid of judgement. So I continued to be weird and outgoing, I kept up my shenanigans even after people began to stare. Slowly, I saw some of my friends come out of their shells, they followed my lead and started to own who they really are and discover a better version of themselves. It made me extraordinarily happy to see my friends being themselves. In time, my entire friend group had gone from a collection of quiet, reserved kids. To a variety of children all with different interests and strengths. We started a chain reaction, we spread our freedom of self-expression to as many classmates as we could, each day we were allowing more and more kids to be comfortable being themselves.

To this day we continue to show the world that we are not afraid to be who we are and we continues to inspire other people to find their true self and share it with the world.

Everyday I encourage others to own who they are. I believe that every person in this world has a right to be who they truly are, with no fear. A world where everyone has the freedom to live as they desire, is a world without corruption. Although I cannot free all people from the overwhelming oppression of their self expression, I can help those around me discover their true selves. In my own self expression, I have the ability to inspire others. My difference is made through me being different.