

Kiden-Aloyse Smith

44

1st Place Tie

2/12/19

Responsibility

Sitting in my honors and AP classes, I already broke through a bias that many people have towards black teenagers: I don't belong there. Even within my classes, I still get that sense from even my most liberal classmates. In these settings, my academic opinion isn't always respected, but when it comes to how to end racist behavior, I become a human Google. I have no problem addressing what I think will end biases, but I'm a single black girl, not the entire race. My opinions are just that, opinions. I also have biases of my own.

Growing up in a majority white setting, I had a lack of black friends. I was raised in a household filled with black authors lined up on our bookshelves, a home where my dad made my siblings and I watch a video on Emmett Till and Roots, and I'd get dolls that looked like me. Despite all this, race was a sensitive topic for me to deal with. I was a black kid, yes, but I was apart of another culture: suburban black kids. Suburban black kids who live the life of Black-ish or the Cosby Show. Suburban black kids didn't exactly fit the so-called "black experience;" we're seen as white kids with black faces; Oreos. The thing about bias is, it can be ignored. But you can't ignore a bias that stares you in the face, because you are your own bias. I was a black kid, yes, but I was a black kid who referred to skin as 'chocolate' and 'vanilla,' a kid who made a poem about how we "all bleed red," so why does race matter; a black kid who that when the

white kids made fun of me for my Obama pin, I'd take it off and when a girl said if it was back in slavery times, she wouldn't have owned me, I laughed it off, I'd keep my thoughts to myself, and whenever I was around black kids, I felt awkward. My parents gave me everything to feel proud to be black. I was submerged in my culture, but I didn't feel like it.

When Trayvon Martin was brutally murdered at the young age of 17, the same age I am now, my life shook up a bit. I was only 9 years old, but I had three older brothers, one of which was 17 at the time. My only other black friend swung aimlessly with me on the swings and we talked about our fears. It was unspoken, but we both knew: it could've been our brothers. The once innocent and implicitly biased white kids in my class were now boldly biased, while many of us young black kids were having our first lessons how to not get killed by cops. We were told by teachers to ignore those comments or educate our classmates, but that's where the problems lie. I was dealing with biases of my own, so it shouldn't have been my job to teach my classmates why their comments were wrong. Implicit bias isn't a huge issue, and it doesn't make someone a hateful person. Implicit bias is choosing kids to play with because they look like you; it isn't thinking the kids who don't look like you are inherently bad.

Leading up to Mike Brown's murder, my biases had completely shifted. I educated myself on things concerning the justice system, the Black Panthers, and other social movements and started to expose myself to everything black, whether it be music, television, or movies. Immediately after Mike Brown's death, I heard kids in my class tell me how he was a "thug" and one of my teachers try to justify the actions of his murder. I felt an anger I had ignored for years. These were the same kids innocently repeating their parents comments about Trayvon Martin. Their reasonings for his death being justified was only on the bias of his race; they had no clue

what actually happened before making that judgement. That's why recognizing those small implicit biases are important, because it can easily become much more.

The most important step is taking responsibility, recognizing the biases you may have. After that, do self discovery. What I learned when shifting my own beliefs was that you cannot ask other people to help figure it out for you. Asking questions is perfectly fine, but not everyone has the answers; therefore, you have to do your own research to move away from implicit bias.

FEB 22 2019

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1st Place Tie

Casey Stark

Challenging Our Cognition

His voice breaks as he recounts his struggle against racist insults. Each word hits my ear like popcorn popping, and his words boom across the stage with a powerful resonance. He finished his poem, and the crowd erupted in thunderous applause. This was one of many powerful poems recited at a slam poetry competition I attended freshman year. I was part of the slam poetry club at our school that year, and while I never had the confidence or skills to perform my own poetry to an audience, that school year I met some truly wonderful people. The club was diverse, with many African-American and LGBTQ members. In the club, people from these groups challenged my negative, subconscious stereotypes, through both the potent imagery of extremely personal poems and my exposure to these kind, strong people after school every Thursday.

Positive experiences with those who differ from ourselves will challenge stereotypes and negative biases we subconsciously hold. Having curiosity about other people and their life experiences can build understanding and empathy. Sharing information with others about how you or people you know can challenge negative stereotypes about race, economic class, gender, sexual orientation, and more can challenge negative biases.

Bias is an unavoidable result of human nature, as long as people have differing opinions and look different from each other. Bias goes deeper than the opinions and values we hold, however. Subconscious thoughts can conflict the opinions and values we share outwardly. Someone can say, "I'm not racist because I don't think skin color makes someone better than

someone else,” but unconsciously they may favor white people over black people. Since implicit bias can contradict our values and beliefs, realizing our implicit biases can be tricky, and it is uncomfortable to discover we possess them.

Since I was little, my parents have encouraged me to challenge stereotypes. Our family attends Eliot Chapel in Kirkwood, a Unitarian Universalist congregation that focuses on social justice. One of our Seven Principles is the belief in “the inherent worth and dignity of every person.” Our church values became ingrained in me at church and at home. My parents made it clear that I shouldn't think I am better than others because I grew up in a well-off household, or take my situation for granted. Living in the fairly affluent town of Kirkwood shields me from the struggles of people in the lower working class or people in poverty. These factors have determined the people I am most familiar with, and those I've befriended. It could be easy for me or others in my community to possess bias against those less fortunate, simply due to our shared experience.

Another experience that has helped me expand my understanding is joining my high school's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). Its goal is to promote LGBTQ friendly policies in our school. The GSA has made me aware of the needs of LGBTQ students at our school and their struggles through its extremely supportive group dynamic. The GSA educates our school by putting up posters around the school with common misconceptions about LGBTQ people. This strategy would be even more effective if we used our Instagram page to post these misconceptions on to reach a wider audience. If people create social media posts about how to better understand marginalized groups, it can help people identify and confront their implicit biases.

With both the slam poetry club and GSA, I opened myself up to new experiences with people who had different perspectives from my own. In slam poetry, I faced my own bias. I am white, and for some reason I felt uncomfortable in a situation where the majority of people in the club were black. I was ashamed of this, but as the weeks went on the feeling went away, and I grew empathy for everyone in the club. I realized that while I try my best to live my values, my mind will sometimes think against them. I will always need to work to combat these thoughts, as well as fight against the structures of discrimination and white privilege that planted them there. Maintaining curiosity for others is vital to not sheltering ourselves from only caring about people we share physical features and opinions with. We gain a deeper understanding of one another when we talk with people from different groups, and those people defy our expectations. We can then look at our harmful biases, and work to shatter them.

FEB 22 2019

Retzlaff 1

Anna Retzlaff

45

2nd Place

Growing Out of Our Biases

Implicit bias forms based on each person's surroundings, especially when they are young. Growing up, children are especially impressionable. They rely on the people around them to explain how the world works. As far as a child knows, what their parents and other adults tell them gets taken as fact until they go through life and gain their own experiences by themselves. A person's narrow scope on life as they grow is how they believe the world to be. Then, their own personal view on what they experience contributes to their implicit bias.

Having both parents involved in law enforcement since my early childhood shaped the way I viewed everyone around me growing up. I was deeply exposed to tragic experiences of gun violence at a young age. Coming up on the 11-year anniversary of the Kirkwood City Hall shooting, flashes of vivid memories rush back from when my mother, a Kirkwood police dispatcher at the time, returned to work to help after the shooting. Most people saw the City Hall shooting information on the news. This event wasn't a news story to me. Instead, the shooting was my jarring reality. It reached my household and shook up my family. To me, these were people my mom worked with, who greeted my sister and me with candy or a cookie when we came to visit the station. Two of the officers who knew us by name were there one day, and gone the next. After the shooting, my mom took my sister and me into the station with her during the evening to help keep the conference room clean for meetings. In place of the usual jovial greetings and treats we would receive from the police officers we knew, they instead gave us

each stuffed animals for comfort that members the community, mourning the deaths of Officers Biggs and Ballman, brought in to the station to offer their condolences. The mood of a place I knew had shifted. Weeks later, walking our familiar path across the parking lot to IMO's, my mom held my hand, taking me by to where Bill Bigg's body had landed on the pavement, driveway sealant covering up the outline of his body from the crime scene. "This is where Mr. Biggs died," my mom stated. At six years old, that memory of shock, confusion, and fear marked an emotional scar that has stayed within me ever since.

I have personally known three people in law enforcement killed by African-Americans - Bill McEntee, Bill Biggs, and Tom Ballman - before I even turned seven years old. Because of these experiences and the fear that stemmed from them, I had an implicit racial bias as a child. Biases that I could work through during my formative years that may have turned into massive prejudices and ignorance instead turned into a view that shaped me into a person who views the truth and doesn't allow my implicit bias to overtake my opinion. I realize now, the way my parents raised me and arriving at conclusions of my own offset the implicit bias I formed in my young childhood. A way that I began to move away from my bias was going through my own life experiences. As I grew up, although closely exposed to more violence than the average young child, I learned there is much more good out there than bad.

Moving past an implicit bias completely proves nearly impossible, but recognizing and locating where the bias stems from can help one move past their bias. When biases begin to form in a person's childhood, or at any time, they need to recognize and address them as they grow older instead of letting ignorance take over. Biases, especially ones people do not know are there, lead to blindness. Each person should view their world as clearly as possible without letting their

implicit bias impact their opinions, decision-making, or personal view. Each person could stand widening their most-likely narrow perspective by taking a step back to find and work on their own implicit biases. Although we all were once, we are not children anymore. We need to tune into ourselves so that the biases we once formed based on earlier experiences can fade away, so that we can view the world with clear eyes.

AP Lang & Comp Rubric: *Kirkwood HRC Essay*

9 Essays earning a score of 9 meet the criteria for a score of 8 and, in addition, are especially sophisticated in their argument, thorough in their development, and impressive in their control of language.

8 **Effective** Essays earning a score of 8 effectively present the requirements of the prompt. They develop their argument with evidence and explanations that are appropriate and convincing. The prose demonstrates a consistent ability to control a wide range of the elements of effective writing.

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7 Essays earning a score of 7 meet the criteria for a score of 6 but provide more complete explanation, more thorough development or a more mature prose style.

6 **Adequate** Essays earning a score of 6 adequately present the requirements of the prompt. They develop their argument with evidence and explanations that are appropriate and sufficient. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but generally the prose is clear.

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5 Essays earning a score of 5 present the requirements of the prompt. The evidence or explanation used may be uneven, inconsistent or limited. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but it usually conveys the student's ideas.

4 **Inadequate** Essays earning a score of 4 inadequately present the requirements of the prompt. These essays may misunderstand the prompt or fail to completely develop a own position. The evidence or explanations may be inappropriate, insufficient, or less convincing. The prose generally conveys the student's ideas but may be less consistent in controlling the elements of effective writing.

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3 Essays earning a score of 3 meet the criteria for a score of 4 but demonstrate less success in presenting the requirements of the prompt. They are less perceptive in their understanding of the topic at hand, or the explanation or examples may be particularly limited or simplistic. The essays may show less maturity in control of writing.

2 **Little Success** Essays earning a score of 2 demonstrate little success in presenting the requirements of the prompt. These essays may misunderstand the prompt or substitute a simpler task by responding tangentially with unrelated, inaccurate or inappropriate explanations. The prose often demonstrates consistent weaknesses in writing, such as grammatical problems, a lack of development or organization or a lack of control.

1 Essays earning a score of 1 meet the criteria for a score of 2 but are undeveloped, especially simplistic in their explanation or weak in their control of language.

FEB 21 2019

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3rd Place

Anaka Bretzke

The Saint Louis Question

An outsider might view Saint Louis as a city infested with crime, unpredictable weather, and kooky baseball fans whose diet consists of Ted Drewes, toasted ravioli, and Imo's pizza. While Saint Louis identifies as one of the smallest big cities in America, I believe we have the most diverse character. Although the rest of the United States may look down on us, assuming how each and every one of us Saint Louisans live our lives, we tend to judge each other in our own similar, recognizable way. *Where did you go to high school?* It's the seven-word question that some feel perfectly comfortable, even pleased to answer, while others reluctantly respond. Deemed the inevitable St. Louis question, its unsaid purpose is to silently stereotype each individual based on what high school they attended, whether the person asking the question knows they are implying implicit bias or not. From a single, seemingly harmless question, we make multiple conclusions about an individual. With each answer, one could determine religious affiliation, family wealth and personality. Throughout our community, we judge one another based on a statement that usually isn't under our own control. By Saint Louis standards, we need

to move beyond the stereotyping. My generation needs to phase out this question from our culture and realize that our differences make us all unique; as a city, and as individuals.

Growing up in the Saint Louis area, I can recall countless occasions when people asked my mom where she went to high school. Whether the question popped up during a friendly conversation at the YMCA or in the middle of a chat with a fellow preschool mom at pick-up, she'd always hesitantly answer with a half-smile, revealing she attended Fox High School. The reaction always ended up the same, a friendly nod and a high pitched trying-to-sound-nice "Oh, OK", while on the inside it sounded more like a subjective "*Oh*, OK". As a kid, I thought of the question as a simple conversation starter, just regular everyday talk. I never completely grasped the unconscious bias the question implied or recognized how it makes us susceptible to the assumptions that always follow the question. For example, if someone said they went to Priory, a Saint Louisan would automatically assume they're spoiled and belong to a country club. A Parkway Central graduate must be Jewish. A Kirkwood grad must have high test scores and live in a rich neighborhood. We let ourselves use this question as a way to silently judge and stereotype one another.

People who have moved to the Saint Louis area from out of state express how this all-too-famous question bothers them, almost leaving a weird taste in their mouths when they answer. When my grandpa moved here from California in the early 1980s, he recalls how

puzzled and criticized he felt when people would ask where he went to high school. Where he came from, no one cared about where someone else attended high school. Here, people want to know every little detail so, inevitably, we all resort to *Where did you go to high school?* As if that seven word question seemingly defines whoever you ask.

As a community, we must change our attitudes toward this question in order to comprehend that there's more to a person than what high school they attended. A stand-out component of our culture, the St. Louis question develops into an unconscious bias we place on one another. We act as if we know every detail about a person's background based off one transparent question. Working to phase out this implicit stereotyping consists of recognizing we make these assumptions, even if we don't mean to. Unintentionally, our minds still drift to the stereotypes that accompany each person based on what high school they attended. In order to move beyond the bias, we must attempt to actually get to know a person rather than making someone feel ashamed of where they came from. Ultimately, we are all proud Saint Louisans, and we should learn to be proud of our alma mater.