

Students write about discrimination as part of the annual Human Rights essay contest

By Susan Wagner and Nancy Clark, HRA members

“If everyone would stop segregation and discrimination the world or at least the U.S. would be a safer place to live in. Just because your Hispanic, White, Black or even Chinese that’s no reason to be treated differently or not be able to participate.” according to the First place winner **Irma Flores**. Each year students in grades six, seven and eight are given an opportunity to write on a topic relating to Human Rights. This year they were to write about personal experiences with discrimination or discrimination they had witnessed and relate it to the Bill of Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Minnesota Human Rights Act.

Kimberly Saenz our second place winner wrote about a personal experience and her anger with being told she couldn’t speak her familiar language in a public place. She wrote” My friends and I were hanging out at this arcade where different people go. We were speaking in Spanish because one of my friends didn’t know English very well so we were speaking in our first language. One of the staff members told us we couldn’t speak in Spanish there. I asked him why we couldn’t speak in Spanish if that’s the first language we speak. He told us, “Well you people can’t speak Spanish in here because you are in the United States, and if you want to talk in Spanish go back to where you came from.” She goes on to write that “people shouldn’t get treated differently just because of sex, skin color, speaking in a different language, believing in a different religion, being rich or poor, or because they are from a different country... This is what the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says!”

Sunny Mao our third place winner offered some of her thoughts on fighting discrimination. She wrote “we as students are here to get an education. Not to be in a situation of discrimination. Just imagine what we can do together today. Us as human beings we can help the world be a peaceful place with no more discrimination. To stand tall as human beings and put an end to this.” This theme was repeated by Irma Flores in her closing paragraph, “Remember that you have the right to feel free and say your own opinions so don’t let no one make you feel like you don’t belong because everyone in this world is the same no one is better than others.”

The Austin Human Rights Commission would like to thank all the students for their willingness to share their personal experiences and their thought provoking essays. Please take Sunny’s message to heart and “imagine what we can do together today” to end discrimination. Attitudes are changed through personal relationships so please take an opportunity to get to know each other and follow the advice of Sunny “give respect get respect.”