

Facing History and Ourselves **News & Views - Classroom Stories**

I Faced History and Found Myself

Cleveland, Ohio-"I was known as the class bully, taking my title so far that once I nearly broke a kid's arm," recalled Jonathan Lykes about his behavior in middle school. That changed when Jonathan took teacher Lori Eiler's Facing History class as a 9th grader at Shaw High School in East Cleveland.

"I faced history and found myself," he now says.

Through Facing History's approach to studying the Holocaust, Jonathan learned about concepts such as "bystander," "upstander," and "universe of obligation." He began to realize he wanted to care about more than just himself, to give up his attitude of indifference. Jonathan was also inspired by Facing History resource speakers, including Holocaust survivor Max Edelman, South African Constitutional Court Justice Albie Sachs and Carl Wilkens, the only American to stay in Rwanda after the genocide began. These speakers inspired and encouraged Jonathan to take a stand against injustice.

Last spring Jonathan wrote a poem called "Perception" about how prejudice influences our decisions about helping others. It won a regional poetry contest sponsored by the Cleveland Playhouse. Jonathan then went on to participate in a national contest and placed 12th. On October 25th Jonathan, who is now a junior at Shaw, will speak at the First Cleveland Benefit Dinner at the Intercontinental Hotel.

Perception

by Jonathan Lykes

How do they see me?

How do I see them?

For I noticed that there is this thing called perception
that gives people the opportunity for acceptance
or, on the flip side,
to be in the circle of rejection.

All different types of sections and cliques
making fun of that person and talking bad about this person,

so I ask you what is your outlook on things?
So many different stereotypes
and all types of legal rights
being violated just because you look this way or act that way,
and you're telling me it's OK
to give a blind eye to the less fortunate

simply because they're beneath you.

TEST: You're in a dark suburban alley alone,
you see a black man who looks like he's far away from home.
Fear runs down your spine,
and your thoughts roam as you say in your mind,
"this little teenage black boy is up to no good and should be picked up by the police."

But, would you believe that boy was me and
what you didn't see
was I was coming home from youth group?

So, tell me why the mode of predetermined thought towards me?
I'm not in that percentile; I'm trying to be all that I can be,
and you still stone me with your misconceptions about black men.
I tend to understand
that you assume I'm into miss-conjugated verbs, over-sized pants and hip hop,
and when I say I'm not,
its said I am not a real black person.
Perception many times leads to the open door of deception.

Stop. Rewind: I'm here to make a correction
that everything that seems true might not be true.
What you need to do is stop judging others or you will be judged
and release your grudge of a whole race just because of one bad experience,
for I sense a bit of biasness in your presence.

Perception. For one second make an exception
and listen to a person younger than you,
not really wiser than you.
Give me a minute I just might surprise you.

Let's evaluate the date of 1933.
For this is the day [year] that Hitler came to be
the ruler of a country called Germany.
Now let's look back and see
the repercussions that someone could have stopped,
yet, no one dropped their personal business
to help the bigger picture.
Now 12 years later 12 million people are dead;
the year is 1945,
as we attempt to look ahead.

Why do you think no one said stop all these horrible actions?
No reaction until it was too late,
yet the fate of the holocaust we all regret
and we made a bet never to let it happen again.
But, in the mid-90s genocide appears to us again,
and when this happens no one even stops to step in.
So, I ask, does it ever end?

Location... Country of Rwanda and no one even chose to send any hospitality, so when this happened they had to fend for themselves.

Perception. Now I see people plagued with this lasting infection of carelessness once we face history and look it in the eye. It's an embarrassment.

Yes, I do realize good intentions meant, but we still went wrong on our courage to have the right perception.

TEST: You see an Arab man; he comes and sits next to you on a plane.

Your heart pounding, your mind going insane, you automatically think he's there to bring pain, out to terrorize all for "Allah's" gain.

But what's going to put you to shame is that he never hurt a soul in his life, has three kids and a wife.

And, on the Fourth of July, with everyone else he sings, "I'm proud to be an American..."

Wrong perceptions...

tend to hurt more than just peoples affections.

It can damage your mind, body and soul.

So, before you say let's roll,

you should turn back and make sure your heart's in the right place.

Let your misconceptions disappear without a trace, for in this instance, not knowing seems to be the case.

So let me educate you for ignorance is not all that bliss.

Now though the apartheid ending over decades ago, we again miss the lessons that the good Lord showed.

It was like an episode of one problem ending, another one beginning.

For now we have people killing people in Sudan,

and you say to me friend,

how do we help them

when someone down the street is still recovering from "Katrina"

we see how the government put them in the back seat

and the old woman next door is crying and weak

and they're trying to cut off her welfare.

Question:

Is it fair or not fair?

For it is my understanding that none of us have ever been stripped bare, for the whole world to see,

but what I want us to be,

is a society free from all the detrimental mentalities.

What is your perception?

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