

International Peace Day Speech to Charter Oak International Academy

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What do we mean when we talk about peace? A lot of people think that it's when everyone feels safe and accepted in their communities - and that's true. But it's also more than that. The truth is, there is no one definition of peace because it looks different to all of us. I was born in India, raised in Vermont, and then moved to Connecticut, so there have been times when I've felt like an outsider. Because of my experiences, when I think of peace, I think of how important it is to accept and celebrate differences in people. When you think of peace, you might think the same thing, or you might think that peace is more about celebrating a similarity and treating people kindly because underneath it all we're all human. Neither version is wrong.

But you might wonder, if we all have different ideas of what peace is, how do we make that happen? Well that's the thing: peace is what we make of it. It's about what we, as a community of human beings, collectively achieve when we strive for peace. Maybe your idea of peace is stopping bullying, or kids all over the world being able to go to school. No matter what it is, it's in your power to achieve that. Every time you do something, or every time you choose not to do something, you have a chance to build peace, or break it. When you stand up to a bully, or you make an effort to include someone, you make your definition of peace a reality. It's all these little actions that produce great results.

We're so used to thinking of peace as a result of really big acts, like marching in protests that help achieve peace for an entire nation, the way Martin Luther King did. We do this so much that thinking of achieving world peace seems almost impossible. How is a fifth grader at Charter Oak supposed to achieve peace for a person who lives all the way across America - or the world?

I remember I used to think this way a lot. Learning about these amazing historical figures was inspiring, but it also seemed intimidating, like peace-making was for adults who could do big things like lead a protest. But then in 5th grade, a woman named Wangari Maathai came to visit our school. If you don't know, she was a very important peacemaker in Kenya. She combatted poverty and environmental degradation there, and she even won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her work. But what stuck out the most to 5th grade me was that it all came down to planting trees. She had noticed that women didn't have a lot of food or firewood, and they had to walk a long way in the hot sun just to get these things. So she started the Green Belt movement which encouraged women to plant trees, which would provide food and wood, as well as shelter from the heat. And what started as just planting trees eventually turned into an entire movement for equality. And I think that's when I really started to realize that our smallest actions can have the greatest impact.

So start small. Start at school. What can you do here that makes this a peaceful environment? Maybe it's standing up for someone who's being bullied, or stopping a rumor that's being spread. These little things make sure everyone feels safe and accepted. Then think of things you can do in West Hartford that make it more peaceful. Donate to the food pantry, or host a bake

sale for a cause you care about. These might not seem like the kinds of things that accomplish world peace, but think about it this way - there are about 60,000 people living in West Hartford alone. Can you imagine what 60,000 people can accomplish if they're all working towards peace? We're all a part of that!

We can't expect to wake up one day to a world that has suddenly "accomplished peace." It's up to us. The heroes we look up to, Martin Luther King Jr, Mahatma Gandhi, Malala Yousafzai, they didn't have a grand, master plan to achieve world peace. It happens bit by bit. It's a collaboration between every person on this planet. One day at a time, we learn to treat people better, to stand up for our rights and other people's rights. We learn from the great peacemakers that came before us, and then we inspire the people around us in the same way. Girls who have been told they can't go to school because of their gender learn to demand equal rights because they saw a brave Pakistani girl stand up for her right to go school. People of color learn to expect equality because they listened to the leaders who rallied during the Civil Rights movement. In that same way, your actions inspire others to be better, and do better. Your actions play a huge role in achieving peace, not just because of what you do, but because of what you inspire others to do.