

**URI's Center for Nonviolence & Peace Studies
honored Gandhi essayists and Selfless Service recipients at May 1 remote ceremony**

KINGSTON, R.I. – May 5, 2020 – The University of Rhode Island's Center for Nonviolence & Peace Studies honored the finalists and winners of its Tenth Annual Rhode Island 8th Grade Gandhi Essay Contest during a remote ceremony May 1 at 5 p.m. They were joined online by approximately 70 people, including 8th grade essayists, their families and teachers. The Gandhi Compassion & Selfless Service nominees were recognized also and given special certificates.

Each year the URI Center for Nonviolence & Peace Studies hosts this state-wide contest. The purpose is to celebrate the life teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and to encourage Rhode Island students to think critically about, to personally connect with, and to become nonviolent peacemakers in their schools and communities. Gandhi's words, "*Earth provides enough to satisfy every [person's] needs, but not every [person's] greed,*" served as an essay prompt for this year's contest. Most of us know that Gandhi was a moral and political leader, a nonviolent activist, a humanist, and a pacifist. However few think of Gandhi as an environmentalist. Yet, he was, as were many of his followers. He spoke of environmental problems over a hundred years ago, illustrating his insight and farsightedness. Today, Gandhi's perceptiveness is still relevant as we become more aware of the global environmental crisis.

One hundred eight students, from 23 schools and 28 teachers, submitted entries this year. They were encouraged by their teachers to celebrate the life of Gandhi and to think critically about his lessons of peaceful resistance and nonviolence actions to bring about positive social change and cultural equality.

Thirteen finalists were honored: **Vanessa Anaya** (Segue Institute of Learning, Teresa Lauth, teacher), **Tory Blechman** (Curtis Corner Middle School, Ruby Wilde, teacher), **Jessica Flores** (Segue Institute for Learning, Teresa Lauth, teacher), **Juliana Hayes** (Rocky Hill School, Jody Cicchese, teacher), **Eleanor Kirkman** (Gordon School, Luke Anderson, teacher), **Hannah Pearson** (Exeter West Greenwich Junior High School, Gillian Buckler, teacher), **Eitan Pessin** (Gordon School, Luke Anderson, teacher), **Ava Rataic** (St. Philip School, Serena Burt, teacher), **Alessio Scanapieco** (Monsignor Clarke School, Rosemarie Comforti, teacher), **Delia Tanzi Buchbaum** (Quest Montessori School, Auburn Cole, teacher), **Nabou Thiam**, (Good Shepherd Catholic Regional School, Celeste Chudy, teacher), **Benjamin Togbay** (Portsmouth Middle School, James Murray, teacher), **Ciel Tougas** (Quest Montessori School, Auburn Cole, teacher).

Three third place awards were given, with a cash prize of \$50 each: **Natasha Connolly** from Gordon School in Luke Anderson's classroom, **Olivia Noon** from St. Rose of Lima School in Sarah Power's classroom, **Kiara-Lynn Pinto** from Segue Institute of Learning in Megan Starr's classroom.

Two second place awards were given, with a cash prize of \$75 each: **Madeline Brock** from Curtis Corner Middle School in Ruby Wilde's classroom, and **Issy Swain** from The Pennfield School in Lori Hawk's classroom.

The first place champion of the 10th Annual Rhode Island 8th Grade Gandhi Essay contest, with a cash prize of \$100, was **Eva Mermin** from The Pennfield School in Lori Hawk's classroom. Eva impressed us all as she read her passionate essay aloud.

The Gandhi Compassion & Selfless Service Awards give tribute to students who exemplify the qualities of compassion and service according to Gandhi's philosophy, "The best

way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” The two recipients of this prestigious award were **Faith Daggett** from Warwick Middle School nominated by teacher Carol Papa, and **Alex Lehouiller** from Rocky Hill School nominated by teacher Jody Cicchese.

Since 2010, more than 1,200 students have submitted essays based on quotes from Gandhi’s work and life. All Rhode Island 8th graders were eligible to participate in this educational contest, including home schooled individuals. The judging committee was made up of Gandhi Scholars, URI Professors, and Public School teachers. This was no easy task, as the essays were exceptionally well written demonstrating deep thought, research, and personal connections. Congratulations to every 8th grader who took the time and effort to research and learn more about Gandhi and nonviolence and participate in this annual URI event.

Listen to Eva read her winning essay and see all the smiling faces of all winners, found on the Gandhi page at the [Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies](#).

URI’s Center for Nonviolence & Peace Studies advocates the teachings and lessons of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi through education and training in peaceful alternatives to violence conflict.

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