



## 2017 BE INSPIRED Essay Contest | Age Group: Grades 6-7

2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner: Georgia Cox  
Age: 7<sup>th</sup> Grade  
School: Sewickley Academy

---

A person who can share his or her thoughts and truths with the world can accomplish many things in life. It isn't always easy to share one's truth because it could be frowned upon or even offensive to society. People will not always agree with the things one believes in, so it could be hard to share openly. Others may even try to censor someone's truths for fear their ideas will become contagious. Maya Angelou and Ellen Degeneres may seem as though they have little in common. They did not grow up in the same time or with similar struggles; however, they both had a period in their lives when they couldn't share a part of themselves that made them who they were. Like Angelou, Degeneres spoke freely about her personal thoughts and truths, most notably her sexuality, despite backlash and to fight for civil rights.

Speaking in ways that people find entertaining and artistic can show the way people feel without having to worry about the outcome. Maya Angelou used her ability and talent by writing poems and books to tell people if they are hurt, he or she should speak up. She sends this message powerfully through, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, where she explains that even though one feels imprisoned, he or she can still "sing" their story. Similarly, Ellen Degeneres uses the media and comedy to demonstrate that a person can express oneself without fear and still be liked for being perfectly herself. When people criticized her for her expressing her sexuality, she responded, "The only way I'm trying to influence people is to be more kind and compassionate with one another."

Also, both persevered in the face of adversity. After coming out as gay on television, Ellen received tons of hate mail, rude comments, and even death threats. This didn't stop her from sharing her beliefs and loving herself for who she was. Ellen is a huge inspiration for many people across the world. Not only people a part of the LGBTQ community, but anyone who feels shut out or different. Similarly, when Maya Angelou had revealed to her brother that she had been sexually assaulted she was scared. After staying mute for five years a friend of her family's, Mrs. Bertha Flowers, helped her regain her voice through reading literature and creatively writing. She used her skills and wrote beautiful poems and books about what she went through. It was hard for both to relive the things they went through, but both wanted everyone to know their story, and maybe even reveal their own story.

Both committed their lives to helping people be proud of who they are and what makes them unique. Maya Angelou wrote a lot about her childhood and the issues that occurred during that time. Angelou writes about the hardships she faced because she wants to let the reader know that they shouldn't be afraid to be different. Instead, they should accept it and love themselves for it. Like Angelou, Ellen Degeneres tells us that being different doesn't mean that you shouldn't have the same rights as others. Degeneres teaches us that you don't have to get a prize for every good deed you do, but it's the feeling you get while doing it. It's the smiles you get to create and the happiness you give.

In researching these two wonderful women, I've learned that I shouldn't be afraid to express what I think or who I am because it can make a huge difference in the world. I want to work for increased gender equality and help my peers realize that no matter the race, gender, or religion, everyone should have the right to express themselves without judgment. I also want everyone to know that you shouldn't be afraid to be different, and you should accept and love yourself because there will never be anyone like you ever again. Ellen and Maya also taught me to look around and think about the what I'm saying; you never know who is staying silent or singing for freedom.