



2017 BE INSPIRED Essay Contest | Age Group: Grades 8-9

1st Place Winner: Ananya Rao
Age: 8th Grade
School: Seneca Valley Middle School (Seneca Valley)

Soaring through the air on a magical broomstick. Fighting dragons and meeting merpeople. Defeating a wicked wizard in a duel to the death. Everybody dreams of being a hero, whether a fictional one, like a knight in shining armor, or like a real-life one, like a policewoman. J.K. Rowling, an author from a small, English town, brought these amazing scenes to life. Rowling has changed the world around her, inspiring and molding millions of children to be a hero like the characters in her books. She can easily be compared to the African-American activist, poet, and writer, Maya Angelou, because both used courage and passion for their work to make a difference, they share many important qualities, and both inspired people of all ages, like me, to believe that the impossible might just happen if they put time and effort into it.

While writing her first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, J.K Rowling was a single mother working as a part-time teacher. She poured her soul into these books and they inspired many children around the world to be the best that they can be. When J.K Rowling tried to get *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* published, she was rejected over and over by companies who thought that no one would be interested in her books. She persevered though, and now she is one of the richest and most successful people in England. Maya Angelou overcame a grim childhood and the years after it, to get where she was as a powerful writer and motivating woman. "You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them." Angelou suffered through racism and sexism but she didn't let these malicious remarks diminish the power she held through her words. Both Rowling and Angelou started and participated in charities, passing on the spirit of their work and laboring to make a difference in any way they can. Both of them have been through strenuous times in their lives but they persevered and spread the joy and passion they put into their work to people all over the world.

J.K. Rowling and Maya Angelou both possess many important qualities such as courage and tenacity. Growing up in Stamps, Arkansas during the 1940's, Angelou faced the loathing of the white people in the town. They despised her for being an African-American. She didn't let this get to her though, and she grew up to be a famous activist and poet. She used the troubles she faced while growing up to fuel the emotion in her work. Rowling used this same quality to write and publish her books. She never gave up trying to publish her books and even though she struggled to be able

to provide for her daughter, she used every spare moment she had to write her first book. Another quality that both of these extraordinary women share is courage. If Maya Angelou didn't have the courage to speak up against all of the people that dragged her down, then the U.S. would still be a place where because of how someone looks, they would be cruelly treated. J.K. Rowling most recently displayed courage in expressing her views on the 2016 election. Rowling conveyed her negative thoughts on (then) Presidential candidate Donald Trump. She compared the president-elect to the villain from her *Harry Potter* series, "Lord Voldemort". Even after the election, Rowling continued to make remarks about him, which showed great courage on her part: the Americans who supported President Trump could easily stop buying her books and merchandise, which would cost her a great deal of money for her charities. These qualities are very important in life because without them, every time something goes wrong, we would give up, and we would never amount to anything.

I have learned a great deal from both J.K. Rowling and Maya Angelou over the course of my life. When I read the *Harry Potter* series for the first time, it inspired me to keep on reading. Before that I wasn't much of a reader, but afterwards I would read four to five books a week. The characters inspired me to do the best I can and to just be me. Maya Angelou taught me that anything is possible and that I can do anything I want to if I just work for it. Throughout her life, she wrote to bring justice and peace to the world and now, I am inspired to at least try to do the same. Because of their work, I now want to have a job that will help people and inspire them, so I can follow in Maya Angelou's and J.K. Rowling's footsteps. Both of these influential women changed my life from the moment that I heard of them. Their words were carried away like ripples in a pond.

Women were often overlooked in our society. As short as a hundred years ago, women were expected to just stand behind their husbands and to take care of the children. Because of women like Maya Angelou and J.K. Rowling though, we are now recognized as equals and our words can and will be heard, instead of being brushed off like annoying, inconsequential flies. Angelou and Rowling are similar because they both worked passionately to make a difference in the world, they both employed qualities such as courage, and perseverance to make that change, and they both have inspired many young men and women everywhere to step up and speak out. I know that it will be very hard to live up to the work of these literary queens, but I intend to try. Every minute of the day, I will keep in mind what these great people have done for our society, and I will aspire to do what they did. That is what we all must do...work and try and do our best, until we can join them and many others in the pages of history.