

A supplement to
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THE CURRENT EVENTS MAGAZINE

YOU CAN CHANGE THE WORLD!

You and your friends *can* make a difference. Let this guide inspire you to take action now.



Civics IRL

DO YOU WISH YOU COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD—BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START?

We understand: With so many major issues facing our country, some days it can feel impossible for one person to have an impact. The teens on these pages have all been in that spot—they saw a problem, or felt passionate about an issue, and wanted to do something about it. Some of them were told “no.” Others didn’t know where to begin. But they refused to give up. Let their stories inspire you.

Many people doubted that **Mike Floyd**, 19, could beat his 47-year-old opponent for a spot on the local school board in Pearland, TX—but he did!

 That's *In Real Life!*

STANDING UP FOR EQUALITY

Mike Floyd was 9 years old when he first experienced inequality. “I was at the school cafeteria going to pay for my lunch. There wasn’t enough money in my account, and so the lunch worker wordlessly took the meal I’d picked out and swapped it for the free/reduced meal plan lunch: two tasteless pieces of bread with a slice of rubbery cheese. It woke me up: I was so troubled that there were kids who had to settle for this every day,” he says.

Fast-forward to Mike’s senior year of high school last spring: He ran for a spot on his district’s school board against a 47-year-old opponent. And the values that helped him win weren’t that far off from the ones that first opened his eyes in the fourth grade: “The biggest issue for me is establishing real equity in this country. People aren’t the same, our histories aren’t the same. We need to equalize our social and legal existence.”

“I work on a board where everyone disagrees with me on nearly everything, and I disagree with them on nearly everything! But having a diverse view of opinions is so important in a democratic government.”

—Mike Floyd

people, who’ve grown up in a time when we can find out anything we want almost instantly, to know that change takes time. And it should take time. This experience has taught me that while the system we have has many flaws, it’s worth fighting for.”

THREE WAYS TO AMPLIFY YOUR VOICE

1. EMAIL YOUR REPS

You’d be amazed at how responsive most representatives are. “Nobody wants to be the one to ignore children!” says Meg Heubeck, the director of instruction

at the University of Virginia’s Center for Politics, who oversees the Youth Leadership Initiative (youthleadership.net). “Younger people actually have a better chance of getting a response than older people. People pay special attention to youth voices.”

2. USE SOCIAL MEDIA WISELY

Ask yourself “What do I want to be known for?” Then use your social media platforms to make it happen, says Heubeck. The teens on the following pages all used social media to spread their mission and reach people they otherwise never would’ve connected with. But they all caution against relying too much on social media. “You don’t want to lose your sense of empathy, which can happen when you’re behind a screen,” says Mike Floyd.

3. RUN FOR OFFICE!

Whether it’s student council, school board, mayor, or beyond, view elections as more than popularity contests, and as real opportunities to be the voice of your peers and their passions.

FOLLOW MIKE! votefloyd.com **FACEBOOK** [votefloyd](https://www.facebook.com/votefloyd) **TWITTER** [@MikeFloydTX](https://twitter.com/MikeFloydTX)



Friends Priya Vulchi (right) and Winona Guo, both 18, created a textbook about race and racism that is used in 30 states.

CHAMPIONING RACIAL DIALOGUE

It was the start of their sophomore year of high school in Princeton, NJ, and Priya Vulchi and Winona Guo were feeling overwhelmed by the latest news. Their class had been discussing the events of the summer, including the protests over the shooting of an unarmed black teenager

“In the beginning it was difficult to ask for help. [But you need to] ask for help, and look for mentors.”

—Winona Guo

by police in Ferguson, MO. Looking around their own town, they realized that race affected every part of their lives. “Our neighborhoods were divided by race,” says Winona. “Our friend groups were divided by race. Our clubs and classes were too.”

They didn’t know what to do, but they did have experience working for their school media, so they did what came naturally: “We started talking to people. We’d tap random strangers on the street and interview them on our phones about race,” says Priya. They collected the stories and posted them on a website they built, PrincetonChoose.org. Then they went one step further: They thought about how to make an impact in their school. “We started speaking at board meetings and doing presentations to teachers. They told us they agreed, but they needed tools,” explains Priya. And so the girls created a textbook, *The Classroom Index*, that is used as a way to address race and racism. It’s taught in schools nationwide.

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WELCOMING REFUGEES

It was an ordinary fall morning in the homeroom of Peyton Klein’s Pittsburgh high school. But Peyton couldn’t focus. “My teacher and a student who didn’t speak English as her first language were having a hard time communicating. I wanted to help, but I didn’t know how,” Peyton says.

That gap between wanting to help and not knowing how motivated Peyton to get involved in her school’s ESL (English as a Second Language) program. Talking to teachers and students, she came up with an idea: “I realized that if American-born and immigrant students interacted more, it would help us all to overcome cultural intolerance,” Peyton says.

In December 2016, Peyton launched Global Minds Initiative—a school club that brings together native and non-native English-speaking students to talk, take field trips, and hear guest speakers. Today, it has 13 chapters in more than 50 countries and about 500 participants. “Refugees are not just statistics—they are human beings with futures and passions,” says Peyton. “To create the next generation of American leaders and voters, you have to talk to people from other communities.”



Peyton Klein (right), 16, with Khawla Issa, 18, a Syrian refugee—now one of Peyton’s best friends.

“If every single person was committed to one issue and channeled their actions, and took it beyond tweeting into actually doing something, then we could all change the world.”

—Peyton Klein

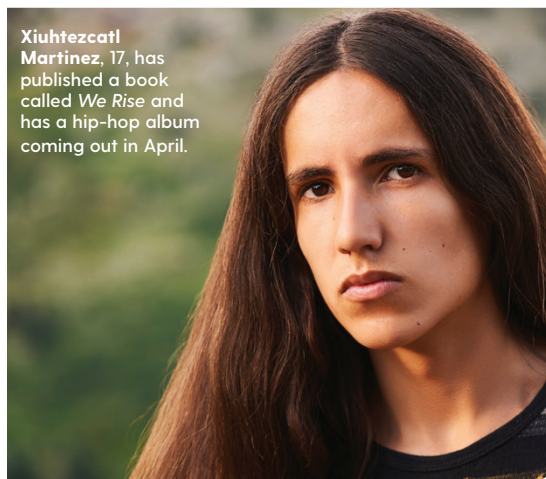
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HEALING THE PLANET

Xiuhtezcatl Martinez didn’t grow up in a family of politicians. He didn’t even go to school until he was 10. Living in Colorado, his family taught him at home, where he gained a deep appreciation for nature. “My father is native Mexican, and my family raised me to see the inseparable connection that we all have to nature. It’s not just a part of indigenous identity, but human identity,” he says. Now, Xiuhtezcatl (pronounced “shoo-TEZ-cot”) is an environmental champion. He’s the youth director of Earth Guardians, an organization that helps people make a difference for the environment. He’s addressed the United Nations three times, and was part of a lawsuit against the U.S. government, claiming it hasn’t done enough to protect the earth.

He learned the importance of speaking up from a young age. At 9, he and some friends went to a city council meeting to take a stand against the use of pesticides in their community. The council heard the group’s point of view, and went on to ban the use of those chemicals. “It’s pretty crazy how if we put our voices out there, our elected officials and our politicians will pay attention.”



Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, 17, has published a book called *We Rise* and has a hip-hop album coming out in April.

“The first step in any kind of change is recognizing that we have power in our voices.”

—Xiuhtezcatl Martinez

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Daniela, 18; Alexis, 18; Gloria, 18; Jasmin, 18; and Alex, 17, recently traveled to Washington, D.C., for a United We Dream summit.

There's power in numbers.

That is why 400,000 people have become involved with United We Dream, the largest immigrant youth-led organization that is helping undocumented immigrants.

Here are some of their stories

Gloria was 11 when her father was deported by the U.S. government. That means he was sent, against his will, from her family's home in Texas back to Mexico, where he was from. Soon after his deportation, her father died—leaving Gloria to help her mom support their family.

Alex came to Texas from Mexico when he was 4 months old. He's not a U.S. citizen, but currently, he has rights under the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program. That keeps him protected from deportation and gives him the right to work, get a driver's license, and go to college.

Daniela was flown from Mexico to Texas when she was 5 years old for surgery. She's lived in the U.S. since then, and is preparing to finish high school this spring. But since she's not a U.S. citizen, as of this reporting, she won't be eligible to apply to college.

Alexis, a U.S. citizen from Texas, is fed up with watching classmates and neighbors fear deportation.

Jasmin, also a U.S. citizen, has a close undocumented friend who lives in fear of being deported.

What do the young people involved in United We Dream want you to know? For starters, that 800,000 undocumented youth have benefitted from the DACA program—but the program has been eliminated. Congress is currently reviewing it. Second, that the Dream Act is a bill that if it is passed by Congress, would create a way for undocumented youth to get citizenship. It would give them permanent protection from deportation, the ability to work, go to college, get a driver's license, travel outside the country, and vote. Says Alexis: "If we don't speak up, who will? I speak for the people who live in fear of being deported."

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TAKE THE "DIS" OUT OF CIVIL DISCOURSE

With our country feeling so divided, it's important for teens with different viewpoints to connect and learn to understand each other. Meg Heubeck of the Youth Leadership Initiative created the idea of "taking the dis out of discourse" to get students talking—and listening. She recommends these steps:

Practice. It sounds weird, but learning to work with different viewpoints isn't a natural skill—it requires effort. Ask your

teachers for time to practice debating issues. Youthleadership.net has research sheets on a range of topics so that you can find solid info to argue both sides.

Really listen. As soon as someone starts speaking, most of us are already planning how we're going to respond. Instead, take time to think. And the best way to do that is to take notes while someone is talking; then pause, and move on from there to...

Ask meaningful questions. Once you're truly listening, you can reply by asking deeper questions—instead of just reacting with your viewpoints.

Keep the convo going. Don't let dialogues end because the bell rings, or the car ride is over, or a friend has to leave for dinner. Revisiting tough conversations is—surprise!—the way to make them easier, and more productive.

Learn more about your government and how civics work at scholastic.com/wethepeople.