

A supplement to

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YOU CAN CHANGE THE WORLD!

Look around you. See something you don't like? You have the power to change it. Let this guide inspire you.

 **SCHOLASTIC**

Civics IRL*

WE KNOW: YOU'RE CONSTANTLY TOLD YOU HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE.

But can one person make a difference? The teenagers on these pages certainly did. They all saw a problem, or felt passionate about an issue, and did something about it. 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,” he says. “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.”

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 incumbent. And the problem of inequality was still very much on his mind: “The biggest issue for me right now 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.”

Mike stood up for issues like more funding for schools; the right for transgender students to use the bathroom they identify with; and more transparency, meaning the public should have the right to know exactly what goes on at public officials’ meetings, like those of the school board.

“I had a friend who said ‘Why are you doing this? What’s the point?’ He felt like it didn’t matter. And if you just look for negative things, that’s what you’ll find. But I think it’s important for young people,

“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

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 flaws, it’s worth fighting for.”

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

THREE WAYS TO AMPLIFY YOUR VOICE

1. EMAIL YOUR REPS

You’d be amazed at how responsive most lawmakers are to their constituents, especially young ones, says Meg Heubeck, the director of instruction at

University of Virginia’s Center for Politics, who oversees Youth Leadership Initiative (youthleadership.net). “Younger people actually have a better chance of getting a response. 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 platforms to make it happen, says Heubeck. The teens on these pages all used social media to spread their missions but they also all caution against relying on it too much. “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.



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 the year at their school in Princeton, NJ, and Priya Vulchi and Winona Guo were feeling overwhelmed by the news.

Their class had been recounting the events of the summer, including the protests over the shooting of an unarmed black teenager by police in Ferguson, MO. But looking around

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

—Winona Guo

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's media, so they did what came naturally: "We started talking to people. We'd tap 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 day-to-day lives, 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*. It includes more than 150 stories from people talking about the role of race in their lives. And it's now used in schools nationwide.

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WELCOMING REFUGEES

It was a typical fall morning in the homeroom of Peyton Klein's Pittsburgh public high school. Everyone was filling out paperwork. But Peyton couldn't focus on hers. "My teacher and another 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 the girl's name, or what she needed."

That language barrier propelled Peyton to get involved in her school's ESL (English as a Second Language) program. Talking to teachers and students, she came up with a natural solution: "I realized that if American-born and immigrant students interacted more, it would help us all to overcome cultural intolerance."

In December 2016, Peyton launched Global Minds Initiative—a school club that brings together native and non-native English-speaking students to talk, go on field trips, and do other activities together. Today, it has 13 chapters and engages 500 students in the U.S. and Canada, including those from more than 50 countries. "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, 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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globalminds.world
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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 for the first ten years of his life. Instead, he was raised in Colorado around family, and with 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 one of the world's most-known environmental champions. 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 environment.

He learned the importance of speaking up from a young age. At age 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's 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 years old when her father was deported by the U.S. government, meaning he was sent, against his will, from her family's home in Texas back to Mexico, where he was from. "He was an undocumented citizen, and he kept telling me everything would be OK, but it wasn't," Gloria says. Shortly after his deportation, he died—leaving Gloria to help her mom support her family.

Alex came to Texas from Mexico when he was 4 months old; he's not a citizen, but currently, he has rights under the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program—which has protected him and other undocumented youth from deportation and given him the right to work, get a driver's license, and go to college.

Daniela knows how overwhelming it can feel to live in this country without citizenship: Diagnosed with cancer at age 5, she was flown from Mexico to Texas for surgery. In the U.S. ever since, she's undergone four hip transplants and is preparing to finish high school. 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, is fed up with watching classmates and neighbors fear deportation when they're hardworking members of his community.

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 would create a way for undocumented youth to get citizenship. It would give undocumented youth permanent protection from deportation, and 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

Meg Heubeck of the Youth Leadership Initiative created the idea of "taking the dis out of discourse" to get students talking—and listening. Her 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.

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 secret way to make them easier, and more productive.

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