

2022-2023 Lions International Peace Essay Contest

Grand Prize Winner Keaton Hamilton, 11 years old

Friends as Leaders

Right now, wherever you are at this moment, I would like you to imagine that you are a new student in grade 5. You are 5 feet tall, like video games, play sports, and you're just like an ordinary kid. But there's a wall between you and the rest of the students, in this class (not literally of course). You can't see that well. Not the writing on a white page, but the objects around you. Not the colours of anybody's eyes, but the colour of desks, chairs and markers. Now, a short kid with black hair looks at your white cane, hanging on a hook by the door. "Uh, what is that like a spear or something?" he says with the intent of making others feel sad. "No, it's ... my cane," you say in a small voice. "Don't they tell you no weapons at school?" "It's not a weapon it's my white cane." "Do you know it's white or..." "Stop being rude," says a strong voice coming from another student. "It is what they use to know what's around them, no need to think they can't do anything when they are blind! Don't bully them about something they can't control."

That student who stood up for you. That was completely their choice. They could have said nothing or ignore you all they wanted. But, they went out of their way and stood up for you. This is just one example of "leading with compassion", and even without this example you could probably think of a time in your life where someone looked out for you, assisted you with something, gave you a general hint, etc. When you were in school, maybe your teachers lead with compassion by giving you work in a form that was best for you, whether that be on a computer, on paper with pencil, or upside down. Your friends lead with compassion. After all, somebody who does not is bossy and only thinks about themselves.

We all know the feeling of being looked out for, and having friends to fall back on. Knowing that someone has your back while accomplishing any difficult task and achieving goals is one of those shiny diamonds in life.

We all play a role in ensuring that our peers feel welcome and safe in learning environments, groups and while alone. While being a best friend is not required, at least look out for people and make sure to help if they ask for it. Everybody in a community is responsible, should feel like they belong, and should try and assist any one in need of a helping hand. Even if it's just another local citizen that seems troubled, you can at least smile or offer guidance. That's how new friends are formed. And remember, there's no harm in reaching out for help. A good person would respond and you can look out for each other. That is what friends would do, and that's what leading with compassion is all about.