

# Hero Project Paper

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To me, a hero is somebody who inspires others for the greater good. They usually have qualities in their character that makes them a leader or someone you can look up to. Sometimes it's what they say, sometimes it's what they do, but a hero usually does both things to help the world become a better place.

For our Social Studies Hero Project I chose Anita Collison. She was my teacher for four years, from third to sixth grade. I learned so much from her about social justice and human rights. She is very enthusiastic and genuine about teaching and what she believes in. She is a very positive influence on her students and I can say personally that she's affected my life in a valuable way.

I am lucky because Anita and I are still close, so contacting her was easy. First I texted her, and then I wrote my questions and sent them to her via email. As usual, she put all of her effort and care into answering them.

Anita's path to teaching wasn't traditional. She started as a crosswalk guard, and later became a bus driver, before finally becoming a teacher. I asked her what inspired her to become a teacher, and if her childhood and where she grew up influenced her future job. She said when she was young, growing up in Oregon, she felt like an outsider and did not feel like she had teachers that were inspiring or even cared about her, and it made her dislike school. Even in high school, where she was bullied, she could not wait to grow up and be in control of her own life. She left Portland for San Francisco, which was a city that she always wanted to go to because she thought it was more of an accepting place. She always liked working with kids, but when her younger sisters went to school at the Open Classroom, she met a teacher named John Kaufman who later became her mentor, and the way he taught the kids made her realize that teaching was an important and inspirational job.

Anita says that as a teacher she wants to approach history "with a sense of responsibility to my students to teach it in a way that is not sugar coating it. We need to be honest to our young people and share with them the good, the bad and the ugly because they are the ones who will be leading our future." The election last year especially inspired her to teach about civil rights, human rights, women's rights, equality, and social justice. She feels that the country's historic past shows a lot of conflict and hardship for certain groups of people, like immigrants, people of color, women, members of the LGBT community and anyone who is considered "different." She hopes that this knowledge will support and encourage students to be caring, compassionate people who will feel empowered to make change and a better world for future generations.

She believes kids can be "the most powerful catalyst for change in the world." She wants students to know there are lots of powerful ways for their voices to be heard besides voting. She suggests writing letters, making phone calls to your elected officials, newspapers, businesses and organizations that affect your issue. You can also join groups and donate money to

organizations that believe in your cause. She says participating in rallies made a huge impact on the civil rights movement and still makes an impact in our country and how other countries see us today. As a matter of fact, the last protest Anita attended was the Women's March in January, but she has also gone to Black Lives Matter events, indigenous people gatherings like Standing Rock, immigration rights actions and protests, and even one in support of science last year. Another important thing about going to protests, marches, and rallies is learning new perspectives and hearing the oppositions side so everyone is represented in their beliefs.

One of the reasons that Anita's human rights hero is Malcom X, is that not only was he strong enough to overcome great obstacles in his early life, and was a great speaker, but he had passion in his beliefs and was willing to change his perspective about these beliefs later in his life. Like Anita, Malcom X believed that "in order for us to make changes happen and to heal from the harsh injustices of the past, we needed to do it together, both blacks and whites." She also greatly admires Emma Goldman, who was a women's rights and political activist from the early 1900's, and Harvey Milk, an LGBT rights activist and the first openly gay person to hold a public office. Anita also said that these three people would be the heroes that she wished she could go back in time and meet, besides a few other artists such as Joe Strummer from the band The Clash, and also Kathe Kollwitz, a German artist who defied the Nazis through her art.

Last year in class, Anita introduced us to a bunch of different political protest songs and had us learn to sing a few of them. I thought it would be fun to ask her what she thought the ultimate protest song was. She said you should never listen to just one, and suggested I hear this list of songs:

Public Enemy - Fight The Power

Dead Kennedys - California Uber Alles

MDC - No War, No KKK, No Fascist USA

Black flag - Rise Above

Nina Simone - Mississippi Goddamn

Clash-Spanish Bombs

Solomon Burke and Blind Boys of Alabama - None of Us Are Free

Stevie Wonder - Livin' for the City

Gil Scott Heron - The Revolution will not be Televised, Whitey on the Moon

Woodie Guthrie - Old Man Trump, Deportee

Milck - Quiet

Patti Smith - People Have the Power

A Tribe Called Quest - We The People

Another question I asked Anita was what cause she feels especially strongly about right now and she said her social justice passion was immigrant rights and racial equality. Our country is really struggling with how immigrants are treated, especially right now and particularly to non-whites. She said, "With so much strife and famine happening in the world, we must be willing to bring more immigrants into our country as many European countries, such as Germany, are doing now. I also believe we need to have a more open border policy for our Central and South American neighbors. I think it should be reflective of our border policies with Canada. Racial equity is something we have been grappling with since the end of slavery 150

years ago, and we still have such a long way to go. The racial equity and socio-economic disparity in Marin County is one of the worst in the country.”

“Can anyone be a hero?” I asked Anita. In her usual positive way, she said that everyday heroes are the best kind of heroes! She thinks people who take action make a difference for others and help pave the way for a better world. She told me about a young gay man named Matthew Sheppard who was killed in 1998 in Wyoming. He did not hide his truth and conform to the way society wanted him to be, and was bullied and murdered because of it. After his death, hate crime legislation was brought about to protect people like him who have been targeted for violence, like members of the LGBT community. Her excellent closing advice was: “The more we can be our authentic selves and not hide in fear of retribution for being different, the more we can embrace each others differences! And the haters then become outnumbered. Live life and love to the fullest.”