

**Lincoln Addington (West Chesterfield, Ohio: 7<sup>th</sup> Grade)**  
**Level II Third Place Winner**  
**Letter to Malcolm X concerning his book, *Autobiography of Malcolm X***

Dear Malcolm X,

My whole life, I have always thought of things in black and white. There were good guys and there were bad guys, heroes and villains, with no exceptions and no room in between. Your book, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, showed me the truth. It changed the way I thought not only about race, but about all the differences people have.

I remember when I was eight. My parents were taking me to the zoo, and I noticed something odd about that part of Cincinnati. The streets were dirtier and the buildings were more dilapidated than in the suburbs where I lived. But even stranger, it seemed like everybody was African-American. It sort of worried me, but I just shrugged it off and tried to enjoy my day at the zoo. I had always been taught that because of Martin Luther King, Jr., the U. S. had been made completely integrated and equal.

In your book, you talked about how, in the north, people would pretend to try to help black people and treat them like equals. In the south, things were actually better, because at least you knew who your enemies were. People would delude themselves into thinking that all the problems of hate and discrimination were in the South, while ignoring the ones in their own backyard.

As a middle class, white male who lives in the suburbs, some of the truths of your book sort of, well, scared me. People naturally see things that challenge their beliefs as a threat, and people also like to ignore problems instead of trying to fix them. When was the last time that you saw someone sitting alone at lunch, and didn't do anything? When was the last time that you saw somebody being bullied, and made up an excuse to just walk on by? Discrimination isn't just limited to people of a different race. Being unfair to anyone who is different is just as bad.

I had liked to tell myself that everything was fine, that the kids who got kicked around were fine, or even worse, deserved it. But your book finally made me see that deluding yourself is not the solution. It doesn't help the people who are being hurt, and it helps you only temporarily. And unless we treat everybody with equal love and respect, we can never truly reach our full potential. If you ignore injustice and discrimination, then you are just as bad as the person who throws rocks and screams racial slurs.

Sincerely,

**Lincoln Addington**