

DIVISION 2: GRADES 4-5 OPINION ESSAY PROMPT

THEME: ENCOURAGING OUR YOUTH TO BE AGENTS OF CHANGE

SCENARIO

Have you ever seen something that just wasn't fair and felt a fire inside you to do something about it? That feeling is powerful. And guess what? History shows that students, just like you, have used that exact feeling to change the world. Long before the famous protests of the 1960s, the NAACP recognized that students possessed a unique passion and spirit. That's why, way back in 1936, they created the **NAACP Youth & College Division** to help young people become influential leaders.

These weren't adults in suits; they were students, some not much older than you, who decided to be brave. The members of the **NAACP Youth Council** didn't just talk about problems—they took action. In Oklahoma City, they organized one of the very first sit-ins at a lunch counter to protest segregation. In Louisville, Kentucky, they led the "Nothing New for Easter" boycotts, convincing stores to hire Black employees by refusing to shop there. They proved you don't need to be a grown-up to lead your community toward justice.

Today, the conversation about how young people can be agents of change is more important than ever. There are many ideas about the best way to make a difference.

- **Be the Voice That Speaks Out.** One view is that young people should follow in the footsteps of the youth councils by taking direct action. This means participating in peaceful protests, writing letters to leaders, and using your voice to call attention to issues that matter. Supporters believe that making noise is the best way to get adults to listen and demand change.
- **Be the Hands That Help.** Another view is that the most powerful change comes from community service. This means volunteering your time to help others at places like the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club or the W.C. Young Community Center. It could also mean starting your own project, like planting a garden at your school or organizing a cleanup day at a local park. People who believe in this path feel that building a stronger community by helping one another is more effective than engaging in protests.
- **Be the Example That Inspires.** A third perspective is that young people should focus on becoming their best selves through personal excellence. The NAACP created a program called ACT-SO ("The Olympics of the Mind") based on this very idea, to celebrate students who excel in science, art, and writing. Supporters argue that by working hard in school and sharing your unique talents, you become a powerful role model. They believe this kind of success is the ultimate way to break down barriers and create lasting change for the future.

All of these are powerful ways to be an agent of change. Now it's time for you to decide which path you believe in most.

YOUR TASK

The leaders of our school systems—the Paducah Independent and McCracken County Boards of Education—are holding a special meeting because they want to hear from the real experts: you. They want to know how they can best support students who wish to make a difference.

Write an opinion essay for the members of the school board. In your essay, **give your opinion on which of the three methods you’ve read about—being the voice that speaks out, the hands that help, or the example that inspires—is the most effective way for students your age to create positive change in our community.**