

## Violence Touches Everyone

Akshaya Annapragada is fourteen years old and is in 8th grade. She wrote this poem in seventh grade in response to the 'Texas Challenge' issued by the "Do the Write Thing" Organization as part of the National Campaign to Stop Violence. Akshaya was selected as a National Ambassador from her area. She attended youth forums and drafted platforms on non-violence and met with State and National lawmakers and leaders at both Austin and Washington DC. Inspired by this experience, Akshaya, a First Degree Black belt in karate, has started Project S. A. V. E. (Students Against Violence Everyday). Under the aegis of this project she has helped to organize and conduct self defense classes for teenage girls through her karate school. She also mobilized students at her Junior High School and its sister Middle School to create 'Peace Themed' art work and jewelry that she then sold at her town's Hometown Christmas festival. All of the \$784.00 raised through the sale of children's art was used to buy needed supplies for a Women's Center that houses victims of violence. Akshaya is currently engaged in a grass roots effort to create a student paper chain where students write about something they want to change about violence.

### "Violence"

Two syllables, but such a big impact

You see it in the eyes of the girl whom no one will sit with on the bus.

You see it in the eyes of the little boy whose lunch money was stolen.

It's in the eyes of the angry teenager whose friend died in the school shooting last month.

It's in the eyes of the small child whose nights are interrupted by his parent's angry fights.

You feel it by the graveside of the honor student killed in gang violence.

You see it in the bruises on the football player who got in a fight in the locker room.

You see it in the face of the girl; bullied till her pain is plain in her eyes.

Violence touches everyone; no one escapes.

Your life, my life--- whose will be ripped apart next?

Tormenters torment because they are tormented.

Maybe by others or even themselves,

They want to feel stronger, more in control.

Everyone's doing it,

Why shouldn't they?

Violence is cool; it'll help me fit in.

That's what they think,

But I know better.

Violence is a vicious cycle because no one steps in.

You walk down the hallway and see a girl being taunted,

But you walk right past.

You see a boy beating someone up,

But you do nothing.

Why?

You don't want to be the next victim.

Living in fear of being the victim, we walk past violence every day.

If we all resolve to say "No" to violence we can stop it forever.

It's time to take a stand.

It's time for us to

Tell the girl whom no one will sit with on the bus

That the kids who exclude her don't deserve her;

Show the little boy whose lunch money was stolen

That he should not be made to feel weak and defenseless,

That he shouldn't feel like he has to give up;

Tell the angry teenager whose friend died in a school shooting

That he has the power to stop that from ever happening again;

Tell the small child whose nights are interrupted by his parent's angry fights

That just because his parent's are violent doesn't mean that is the only way to live;

Show the community ripped apart by the death of a student due to gang violence

That they have the power to make sure his memory lives on forever

As an example of what should never have happened;

Show the football player who takes out his anger through punches

That there are other ways to solve conflicts;

Show the girl, bullied till her pain is plain in her eyes, the true meaning of hope.

If all of us come together, we can stop violence.

If we rise as one,

Become an unstoppable wave,

We will drown violence once and for all.

It will start in small actions;

Offering a hand to the child pushed to the floor,

Sitting with a girl who wears the "wrong" clothes,

But small things add up,

This movement will grow,

Our children will live in a better world:

A violence free world

Akshaya Annapragada