



"Plato's Cave" Grade 6 Student, Whitman Middle School, Seattle

Essay on Superiority

Geoff Berkheimer

Geoff Berkheimer is a fourteen-year-old student in Libertyville, Illinois, who enjoys writing and hanging out with his buddies. He wrote this essay as part of the course "Introduction to Philosophy," taught by David White, Ph.D. at Northwestern University's Center for Talent Development.



A man comes to me with a question one day. He wishes to know if he can achieve superiority. A question riddled with questions, yes? I suppose an excellent person is one who is learned and has achieved everything that they have set out to do. But that has its problems. If a man's only goal in life is to live at home and feed off of his parents for all his life and he does so, then he would not be excellent, for he has done nothing. So a superior person must do something, and do it well, be it running a country or running a construction vehicle.

But an excellent person may not be a superior person for just that reason, as that only covers the work of a person. A superior person, also, must have little, if any, interest in filling his appetite. Profit must be treated as an appetite and, therefore, a superior man would buy only what he needed, and the contrary would buy whatever suited his fancy. A superior person would do his duties without being asked, and his counterpart would do his duties only upon being urged to do so or he would not do the job at all.

People, as a whole, generally associate with whoever they want to. This is what appears most logical to do and this is what a superior person must do, but those whom he chooses to associate with must have high morals and dignity. Therefore, he would not be weighed down by their wrong doings or corruptness.

Finally, it must be said that superiority cannot be learned, as the truly superior person would think of themselves as the common man because they are aware of their faults, even if their faults are few, and therefore would never believe it possible to be superior. It must also be said that perfection is not required for superiority, as perfection, as it is thought of today, is not possible.

I turned to the man, and said "No, you cannot be superior. No one can be superior, not a single person on the earth. People will be excellent and superior in some things but everyone has a fault or thirty, and other people may be superior at one thing and horrible at another. It is therefore, very simple that there cannot be such a thing as superiority. So no, you can't be superior. Nor can anyone. It is simply not possible, but the human race has the right to try and obtain it all the same. Good luck!"

Resources and Ideas for Discussions about Human Rights

Some Discussion Questions/Topics for Essays, Stories, Poems or Drawings



What is a right? Are human rights universal?

Which rights are most important?

What responsibilities do rights entail?

If you were to create a Bill of Human Rights, what rights would you include?

Suggestions for Reading Materials

Four good websites for resources and activities about human rights for K-12 students are:

http://press.coe.int/press2/press.asp?B=30,0,0,0,0&M=http://press.coe.int/Files/RelPub/FactSheetsDH/e_intro.htm

<http://tlc.ai.org/rights.htm>

<http://www.hrusa.org/educate/default.htm>

<http://erc.hrea.org/Library/>

Some of the following readings will be more appropriate for older students and some for younger students, depending on their levels of sophistication and reading abilities.

Elementary School:

Yertl the Turtle by Dr. Seuss

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: An Adaptation for Children by Ruth Rocha and Otavio Roth (United Nations Publications)

Videotape: Amnesty International Animated Version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Middle School and High School:

Chapter 5 from *Savage Inequalities*, by Jonathan Kozol

Long Walk to Freedom, by Nelson Mandela

"Afternoon in Linen," in *The Lottery*, by Shirley Jackson

"The Use of Force," in *The Farmer's Daughter*, by William Carlos Williams