

KnowEl Willhight (8th Grade)
Maumee Valley Country Day School
Principal – Stephanie Harman
Teacher – Emily Green

The Difference

The “N” word has been around for what seems like forever. A word that should have been shunned so many years ago still lives on today. It was used mainly back when African Americans were still slaves and were experiencing much more racism than today. Open racism that is. Today it’s almost as if blacks are condoning racism with a smile on our faces, none the wiser. You see, my major problem is the accepted use of the “N” word in today’s society. It’s used in our music, television, movies, and everyday life. We (all of humanity) walk around with it right under our noses. I believe that by explaining just what the “N” word means and the history that it carries, people will finally understand how uncouth and horrible this word really is.

This problem can be broken into three parts. The first part is the people who believe this behavior is unacceptable yet sit back and do nothing. I used to be one of those people. Thankfully, this contest made me do something. It made me realize that if this was ever going to change, I had to make it change. The second part of the problem is those who think that this behavior is okay. They think that it’s alright because they don’t exactly say the exact word. They take away the “er” and add an “a” and suddenly everything is alright. You see, as years passed and people supposedly progressed, the “N” word was changed and flipped and twisted until it came to mean the complete and polar opposite of its predecessor: friend. “How in the world did that happen?” you might ask. Well, no one likes racial slurs, especially the receiver. So back when racism against blacks was at one of its highs, blacks had an idea. Why don’t we change the game? So they took it and they changed it. They changed it and threw it back in the white man’s face saying “This is ours now. We’ve taken your weapon and turned it into a friend. You can’t hurt us anymore.” When in fact we’ve made a weapon and turned it against ourselves. By doing this we don’t hurt anyone but ourselves. The third and final part of the problem is that the rest of us believe that only blacks can say it, but when it strays outside the community, it’s unacceptable, when in fact, it’s always unacceptable. No one, I repeat, no one should ever let either of those words escape out of their mouth. This word should have been stopped dead in its tracks when racism was at its peak and yet it still lives on in our homes, our music and our televisions. And yeah, it’s great to say that you disapprove but what can you do to change something?

I had the same problem at the beginning of this. I knew that I wanted to do something to help the problem of the “N” word. The thing was I couldn’t think of anything. So I broke down the problem, as I did in the previous paragraph. By doing this I realized that I had two solutions. The first: explain to people what it really means and the negative history that it carries. Most of the people that used the word “nigga” could be swayed by realizing that it doesn’t mean what they think it means; that it and “nigger” were so closely related they were basically siblings. There is barely any difference at all except that one hides behind a fake mask of friendship and the other is bare for all the world to see it rear its ugly head. My second solution is to put up a pledge on our middle school pledge wall so that those who do believe that this is wrong can pledge to finally shun all use of the two words. These people will help stop the problem even though some might think doing it only affects them. I’ve already made one mini speech to my community of middle schoolers and I’ve put up the pledge to not use the “N” word and not to tolerate the use of it around you also. Six people have already signed the pledge and I know that others will also. People came up to me after my speech and told me that what I said was very powerful and made them think. This is how I know that people can make this change if they put their minds to it.

When someone uses or tolerates the use of the “N” word, that doesn’t just negatively affect only them, it reaches out and affects those around you. Then it affects those around them and so on and so on until the entire world is contaminated. Can we stop the disease before it infects the entire world is the question. I believe that by explaining just what the “N” word means and the history that it carries, people will finally understand how uncouth and horrible this word really is. I think that if we take the initiative we can stop the disease. I hope we won’t have to pass this onto our children and they won’t have to suffer through this like we did.