

The wisdom of sev^HH^HHeighth graders: It was not just white people who were helped by Martin Luther King

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(Today is the birthday of the famed civil rights leader, the first time since 2001 that the federal holiday coincides with the correct historical date. It seemed an auspicious date to return to the time machine essay.) The eighth grade students were given the same in-class writing assignment as the seventh graders, with the same ground rules, I took two days off from work to help read those essays like I did with the seventh grade essays. (What can I say. I volunteer for strange things.) When I started reading the essays, I immediately noticed the difference one year makes in the quality of writing. The eighth grade essays are better put-together, the ideas more fully fleshed-out. But that doesn't mean that every single essay is a work of art. Here are selections from some essays that one might call the whey of the crop. **Introductions** It's clear that these students have been taught the importance of having an introduction that establishes the topic of the essay. But some students have taken the formula a bit too literally.

- In this letter I will tell you where, when, and why I would go.
- Come join me in my adventure of words as I explain where I go, when I would go and why I would go there.
- You explained to me earlier that I had to write you a multi-paragraph letter to you explaining where, when and why I would like to go. Here it goes.
- Well I am writing you this to tell you.

It doesn't hurt to flatter the teacher.

- I have to say, this is probably your hugest success in your history of teaching here at X Middle School.
- Wow. You created a time machine. How'd you do that?
- An unaccountable amount of thanks! Sincerely X
- Your going to love the time machine I built, it's on of a kind! [This student is clearly management material, taking credit for somebody else's work.]

Other students took the opportunity to reflect on the nature of the time machine itself.

- I have longed to do this traveling trip for some time.
- I cannot possibly express my feelings of joy through paper!
- I think thirteen years old, is too young to have such an incredulous offer thrown upon you.

A sense of scale

- I would want to go to about 200 B.C. where all of the dinosaurs weren't that vicious.
- On TV they have shows that show how the 80s were. These shows are a lot better than my parents' stories.
- If my science teacher gave me a time machine I will go back in time to the 1800s. Why? Because it will show me more things that my dad and mom went through.
- It would be Washington D.C. in the year 3006... we might have a new president.
- [At age 25] I would hopefully be out of the house by then- & would finally be able to drive

People from the past were so stupid

- This is an ideal choice for me because cavemen are stupid, and there are all kinds of ways to control and manipulate idiots.
- The treasures my cavemen servants would bring me would be spectacular.
- With the knowledge that I have now even at 14 I am smarter than most of the people in England [in the year 1200].

Travelling to the past

- Could you bring people back from the dead? If you could I would get the greatest mines.
- ... but to see everybody dressed like this, I think I might pass out of bad fashion disease.
- But most of their dresses are just down right poofy! And sometimes I wonder how they walk in them.
- The most exciting event to see would be the writing of the Mayflower Compact.
- ... head to the colonies about 1600-1700's. ... I would show off the hover skate board & hover bike, & try to convince them that I am a new born god.
- I will need to find the time of day that he [Abraham Lincoln] died so I can properly time my heroic halting of historic events.
- ... until Hitler committed suicide which obviously led to his downfall. [Not many people recover from suicide.]
- First, many items and services that are now excruciatingly overpriced were a bargain back in the 1950's.
- She made them write their names on a paper.
- But in the 1950's some of the greatest musicians of all time were creating a cornucopia of music created with mastery and skill. [Well, a cornucopia is technically a horn...]

- And it was not just white people who were helped by Martin Luther King!
- I've only heard about what [my parents] wore to school and it doesn't sound too good! [I doubt they think much of what you wear to school either, sweetie.]
- In the 70's they had great bands such as Pearl Jan, The Beatles, AC/DC, and Bon Jovi. [One out of four ain't bad.]
- My hope on this adventure is to learn the correct way to dance the disco. This is because now I only know that you point your finger in the air and shake your booty.
- The Titanic first set sail in 1979.
- I would go to Dr. Stephen Hawking because I could help him improve his work. [With your help, he might become smart.]
- To us right now, \$2.86 per lb. of gas is a lot.
- I never got to do any of these things with [my grandmother], let alone see her; which was nearly every 1 or 2 years. [This is a meaning of the word "never" with which I was previously unfamiliar.]
- I will visit the famous Britch Mussium when I visit London.

Life in the future

- If I go into the future I could see who I end up marring.
- The thing I most want to know is who will be my wife?
- Maybe the robots will feel oppressed and grab torches and pick forks and run all the humans out of town... or the planet!
- I would go to the year 3000 because 3000 seems like a futury time.
- [visiting one future self] What if I get job or even killed!
- Sadly, my house will be turn down and rebuilt for richer people to live in.
- I imagine new sports like a sport that combines every sport into one huge sport. [What about the sport that includes all sports that don't include themselves?]
- Later as the years pass people will be teleported to school or work.
- In 2122, will people have short, long, curly, straight or be balled?
- Same people and environmentalists predict...
- We might have... toasters that sing pop goes your ego.
- Also, I have many ideas about how to become extinct.
- Would there be a devise where you could clone yourself so you wouldn't have to go to a boring event.

Religious-themed

- I would get to see God in the flesh doing maricles!
- I would like to see the Last Supper if I can get in!
- To see him die on the cross and rise from the dead would be an uncanning experience.
- I would go to Herisalem one month before the Crusaification of Christ. The reason I would go the Jerusalem, would be to stop the greatest sin man has ever made. [In other words, you want to destroy the foundation of your religion.]

Spelling lightning round

- If there were title waves I might be able to prevent them in the past.
- Urothain wheels were made out of a certain type of oil.
- I could stop the man who found the gold to be gin with.
- differen't [I've never seen an apostrophe used that way before.]
- Being there would make me feel as if I am apart of history.
- I pounder about all these things...
- ...the midevil ages...
- Everyone in the nabberhod was in a gang!
- The gourds whore heavy steel mail and where armed with large pikes.

Personality

Finally, we have sentences that give us a peek into the student's psyche.

- There are many different ballet techniques many of which have not been discovered yet.
- When I skate I feel accomplished, but to skate and show that I don't care would be the highlight of my life.
- I thrive on the magnificent history.
- Money. That word brings joy to me.
- Fortunately, I'm not crazy.



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