



IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

Winning 2019 Essays



Intercultural Development Research Association – June 2019

5815 Callaghan Road, Suite 101 • San Antonio, Texas 78228

210-444-1710 • www.idra.org • www.facebook.com/IDRAed

IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2019 Essay Contest



Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Winning 2019 Essays

Copyright © 2019 by the Intercultural Development Research Association

Cover photos:

- Top Left - New York City tutors
- Top Right - San Antonio tutors
- Bottom Left - Detroit tutors
- Bottom Right - Odessa, Texas, tutor

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act or by the publisher.

Requests for such permission will be most generously handled by: Intercultural Development Research Association; 5815 Callaghan Road, Suite 101; San Antonio, Texas 78228; Ph. 210-444-1710; Fax 210-444-1714; E-mail: contact@idra.org; www.idra.org

No ISBN. Distributed by the Intercultural Development Research Association. Manufactured in the United States.

This document was prepared with funds in part provided by The Coca-Cola Foundation. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of The Coca-Cola Foundation and no endorsement should be inferred.

IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2019 Essay Contest

IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Congratulations to our 2019 Essay Contest Winners!



High School First Place

ANAHI ORTIZ

12TH GRADE • ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL •
ECTOR COUNTY, TEXAS

"At first, I didn't know how to teach him because he moved too much. Once I even thought he was too hyper for me, but then I realized that I'm the same way... I found that crazy because he ended up with me, someone who has been through the same thing he's going through. Is this destiny or just God's plan? We might never know. But what I do know is that the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has helped me impact another person's life by helping them improve their reading skills."



High School Second Place

JUAN GARCÍA

10TH GRADE • SOUTH SAN ANTONIO HIGH SCHOOL •
SAN ANTONIO

"Every time I go over to the elementary school, I feel a sense of value from my tutees... Truly speaking, throughout my life, so far, I haven't had a good outlook on life. I take life as it comes, and there's not much in this world I could say I cared about. My tutees have brought light upon the good that still exists in this world. Having something to care about is what makes us human. I've begun to care more about myself and those close to me, and I care about my tutees."



High School Third Place

EMAJE' WILLIAMS

11TH GRADE • ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL •
ECTOR COUNTY, TEXAS

"This year, I had a student who didn't like to speak up and pay attention. He was afraid to be wrong and didn't want to be embarrassed. So, I... tried my hardest to figure out ways to help him understand. My tutee has improved so much since then!... His parents even sent a letter thanking me because he's changed so much, and he is always talking about the lessons I do with him... If it wasn't for the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to fulfill my goals. It has shown me that I can make a difference. I am going to become a teacher and help all kids feel that they are good enough and change how they view teachers. I want to be a part of that change."

High School Honorable Mentions

ARIANA SUCHIL – 12TH GRADE • ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL • ECTOR COUNTY ISD, TEXAS

DEYONNA HERNÁNDEZ – 9TH GRADE • SOUTH SAN ANTONIO HIGH SCHOOL • SAN ANTONIO

Elementary School Winners from Charles C Ball Academy, San Antonio

FIRST PLACE – **AMBER ORTIZ** – 8TH GRADE

SECOND PLACE – **SELENA LUNA**, 7TH GRADE

THIRD PLACE – **MYNERVALEE CASTILLO**, 8TH GRADE

HONORABLE MENTION – **LIZETH ACOSTA**, 8TH GRADE



Middle School First Place

VINCE ALINDOGAN

7TH GRADE • NEW OPEN WORLD ACADEMY, LOS ANGELES

"Teachers deserve substantially more appreciation and respect than they get, since they're building our future. I know first-hand that it can be difficult to teach... At first, it was frustrating trying to teach the math concepts in a way my tutees would understand... Now, after a few months of tutoring and practicing my patience, I'm able to help my tutees and give them a better understanding of their assignments. I'm glad that I got the amazing opportunity to be in this program. It's made me a better person and taught me valuable things that will help me later on in life."



Middle School Second Place

FATIMA VALSECA

7TH GRADE • NEW OPEN WORLD ACADEMY, LOS ANGELES

"Before I was a tutor, my grades weren't so good, and I was close to failing the most important subjects: math and English... I have learned about responsibility because I am a mentor to all of the kids before me. Most importantly my commitment has improved like no other... Tutoring isn't just helping kids find an answer. It's building a bond with your tutees... I love knowing that I am making a difference in these kids' lives... I have learned throughout this whole process that every kid is different, but each is unique and amazing."



Middle School Third Place

MIRANDA TORRES

8TH GRADE • DWIGHT MIDDLE SCHOOL • SAN ANTONIO

"The tutees look up to me and it gives me a great sense of being needed, as if I'm important to someone. It feels really good to not only teach but also see them happy, smiling and having a good time learning with me... I also changed for the better because if I misbehave, I can't go to see my students. I have even been told that they ask for me when I'm out sick from school. That makes me feel special and good inside... To make a difference in someone's life, it's the best feeling in the world!"

Middle School Honorable Mentions

FRANK CERDA – 8TH GRADE • ZAMORA MIDDLE SCHOOL • SAN ANTONIO

SARAH PETERSON – 7TH GRADE • CARSTENS ACADEMY OF AQUATIC SCIENCE AT REMUS • DETROIT

HAMEEM AHMED – 8TH GRADE • NEW OPEN WORLD ACADEMY • LOS ANGELES

PAULA OLIVO – 8TH GRADE • DWIGHT MIDDLE SCHOOL • SAN ANTONIO

Elementary School Winners from PS94 Kings College School, New York City

FIRST PLACE – **SARIYAH MITCHELL** – 5TH GRADE

SECOND PLACE – **SHAREEF BELL** – 5TH GRADE

THIRD PLACE – **ANIYAH CURRY** – 5TH GRADE

FOURTH PLACE – **TYLER GARDNER** – 5TH GRADE

FIFTH PLACE – **WINNER MARTÍNEZ** – 5TH GRADE

HONORABLE MENTION – **JAYALAH JONES** – 5TH GRADE

Scan this code to see the full essays and learn more about the IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program!



www.idra.org

See the full essays and the elementary school essays online!

IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2019 Essay Contest

Winner: High School First Place



Anahi Ortiz

12TH GRADE

ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL, ECTOR COUNTY ISD, TEXAS

I was supposed to be in child development, but when my counselor told me the next level was a parenting class, I lost interest. I didn't want to do it, and not because I didn't like it or didn't like the teacher. I didn't want to take the fake baby home and deal with the fake crying. My counselor gave me another great option. He told me that our school had a program that would pay for being in class and tutor little kids. I didn't have to think about it twice. I just nodded my head up and down desperately saying, "Yes!" At first, I didn't have a clue about what I had to do. All I heard was that I was going to get paid just for going to class. Who wouldn't love that?

Honestly, I thank my school counselor because, even though I saw it as easy money, I learned valuable lessons. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is one of the least recognizable but one of the most important programs in my school.

I learned to see other people's perspectives and to make connections with my tutees. I learned how teachers struggle to find new techniques to teach their students every day. I learned how to make a bond and communicate with little kids. The kids share their state of mind, and I love it. They have taught me more than I've taught them. I love my tutee and I really have fun teaching and learning about him.

I now see education in a different way. My tutees' teacher developed a way to let her kiddos know where they stand in their reading, and it helped me know where my student stands. She decorated her door as a race track, and the goal is to get to the finish line. Some students are very close to the goal. The closer they are, the easier second grade will be. My tutee started the year

at the back of the race track, and his car never moved. Though the year, we have worked on reading and recognizing words. Each week, as he gets better and his car moves, the more confidence he has. While his reading car is not at the head of the pack, it has moved even with some of the other kids in his class. My tutee is excited to keep reading and makes progress every week. I am so proud of him and the hard work he has put in.

I've experienced a lot with my tutee while in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. I would leave the classroom with a headache. I found this weird because I loved kids. Why did this one give me headaches? At first, I didn't know how to teach him because he moved too much. Once I even thought he was too hyper for me, but then I realized that I'm the same way. Even though nobody told me, I know I have a lot of energy and to get rid of it I start to move and talk a lot. It seemed like I traveled back in time and was teaching myself. When I was little, I loved to have everyone's full attention and to make eye contact with my teacher because it made me feel more secure. While I worked with my tutee, I realized that he was my exact reflection. I found that crazy because he ended up with me, someone who has been through the same thing he's going through. Is this destiny or just God's plan? We might never know. But what I do know is that the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has helped me impact another's person's life by helping him improve his reading skills. Honestly, I couldn't be happier.



IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2019 Essay Contest

Winner: High School Second Place



Juan García

10TH GRADE

SOUTH SAN ANTONIO HIGH SCHOOL, SOUTH SAN ANTONIO ISD, TEXAS

Since I became a tutor for the Coca Cola Valued Youth Program, the biggest change in my life is growing a sense of self value and learning the importance of maturity. The tutee that I will be sure to remember is Austin*. Being a tutor has helped change my outlook on life, and in this essay, I will bring light upon these details.

At first, I truly didn't expect tutoring to make a difference in my attitude toward anything, but as I spent more time with my tutees I've noticed a difference in myself. I only expected this job to help me learn about teaching and prepare myself for a possible future as a teacher. I started the job still acting immature and making unnecessary jokes. But the understanding that I had that I couldn't make jokes around the students helped me change. I felt more mature when my tutees trusted to ask me for help when they need it. Every time I go over to the elementary school, I feel a sense of value from my tutees.

Austin is the tutee that I help the most, and I find similarities between him and myself. He's a bright student, but he doesn't like to be wrong. When I was younger, I was the exact same way. I despised being wrong, and whenever I was, I would argue or get mad. I want to teach him the same lesson I learned, and that it is okay to learn from your mistakes and move on from them. He has a challenge paying attention to his work. He gets distracted quite

easily and has issues listening. I hope to help change this about him. He doesn't associate well with people he isn't used to, but I'm glad that he opens up easily to me. I hope the best for Austin, and I mean this sincerely with all my heart.

Truly speaking, throughout my life, so far, I haven't had a good outlook on life. I wouldn't say my life has had many issues, but saying that it's been good seems to be a slight stretch. I take life as it comes, and there's not much in this world I could say I cared about. My tutees have brought light upon the good that still exists in this world. Having something to care about is what makes us human. I've begun to care more about myself and those close to me, and I care about my tutees. I enjoy being with my tutees because I'm able to teach them and at the same time they are teaching me.

This is the point in which I choose to conclude my essay. I've learned a lot from my tutees, and I know that I will continue to learn. I thank you for taking the time to read this paper.



**name changed for privacy*

IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2019 Essay Contest

Winner: High School Third Place



Emaje' Williams

11TH GRADE

ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL, ECTOR COUNTY ISD, TEXAS

One mistake I made in life was giving up on finding help when I needed it the most in school. Although the help might have been there, I felt I couldn't ask. Some of my teachers would act as if they didn't want to help me, or other students would make fun of my questions – to the point where I just stop asking anything.

Feeling as if you are not smart enough can change and ruin the way a child learns. It can also play a part in how they decide to act in class. I speak from experience. I stopped trying in my classes. I started acting out in them and tried to be the class clown. I became disruptive to other students' learning, and I started getting sent to the office. I was there so often that the principal became my "best friend." One day, while I was in his office, he looked me in my eyes and asked me why? Why was I acting this way with my teachers? What was the reason I acted out in class but was wonderful while I was in the office? At first, I couldn't answer him, but then I told him all the things. I started crying because I really felt as if I wasn't smart enough and I was embarrassed. In that moment, he told me I was capable of anything and to never let someone be the reason I'm not succeeding. He became my mentor and would help me with anything I needed help with, all I had to do was ask.

My principal never really knew how much he impacted my life because from that day forward I decided to change. I started to pay attention in class, I stopped acting out, and I stopped being the class clown. I decided I wanted to be a teacher and to help

students going through the same situation. That's exactly the opportunity the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program gave me. It gave me the opportunity to make the

kids feel comfortable enough to ask me the questions that needed to be asked. This year, I had a student who didn't like to speak up and pay attention. He was afraid to be wrong and didn't want to be embarrassed. So, I started going a little slower with him and tried my hardest to figure out ways to help him understand.

My tutee has improved so much since then! He is able to keep up with the other students and has no problem asking questions. His parents even sent a letter thanking me because he's changed so much, and he is always talking about the lessons I do with him. This is exactly why I wanted to work with kids. I wanted to help and now I know that I can.

If it wasn't for the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to fulfill my goals. It has shown me that I can make a difference. I want to keep going and help those kids who others don't. I am going to become a teacher and help all kids feel that they are good enough and change how they view teachers. I want to be a part of that change.



IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2019 Essay Contest

Winner: Middle School First Place



Vince Alindogan

7TH GRADE

NEW OPEN WORLD ACADEMY, LOS ANGELES USD, CALIFORNIA

Since I Became a Tutor

When I was first introduced to the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program and heard that it involved tutoring elementary students, I was nervous and doubtful since I was terrible with working with younger kids. I couldn't even help my 9-year-old sister, Sondra*, with her homework without getting impatient or frustrated. I was hesitant until I was told that there was a semesterly stipend. After hearing that, I was eager to tutor. Little did I know, there's more than the money that I'd obtain from this program. Since I became a tutor in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I've become a better person and learned a few things along the way.

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program showed me a glimpse of how challenging it is to be on the other side of education and become the teacher. Teachers deserve substantially more appreciation and respect than they get, since they're building our future. I know first-hand that it can be difficult to teach. Their income isn't high for everything they do for us. From this program, I've learned that teachers and mentors aren't in it for the money. Instead, they're passionate and dedicated people who care about us, the students, and our future. And this is exactly how I feel about my tutees, Amy and Jordan*.

It's a great feeling when my tutees say "Ohhh" as it shows me that they were listening and care about their work. Their attention and diligence of their classwork is the most rewarding part of tutoring and is why I continue to tutor. Before I started tutoring, I already had tons of respect for teachers. But after tutoring for a few months, my respect for them increased even more, and I try to be the best student I can be since I now know teachers are here to help us and want us to return the favor by listening attentively and respecting them.

Before the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I was an impatient person. I was always annoyed whenever my sister didn't

understand her homework the first time I explained it to her. This program gave me a chance to practice my patience. At first, it was frustrating trying to teach the math concepts in a way my tutees would understand without giving them the answers. It took me several weeks to be able to tutor them without giving up and just saying the answers without any explanation.

Now, after a few months of tutoring and practicing my patience, I'm able to help my tutees and give them a better understanding of their assignments. I can now help my sister with her homework without feeling annoyed or frustrated. Thanks to this program, I've become a much more patient person. Having patience is not only necessary in teaching young students, but in everyday life. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has made me an exponentially more patient person.



Before tutoring, I was never interested in a career in education. I thought that teaching would be a terrible experience of disobedient children crying, screaming and yelling. This program opened my eyes and showed me that it's so much more rewarding and enjoyable. My tutees are curious and intelligent students, and I always look forward to working with them. It was a great experience watching them grow and learn new things. And because of how outstanding my overall experience has been, I may even consider a career in education. It's fascinating how only a few months in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program drastically shifted my views on education and teaching.

Although I'm sad that I might not be able to see my tutees after the end of this school year, I'm glad that I got the amazing opportunity to be in this program. It's made me a better person and taught me valuable things that will help me later on in life.

**names changed for privacy*

IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2019 Essay Contest

Winner: Middle School Second Place



Fatima Valseca

7TH GRADE

NEW OPEN WORLD ACADEMY, LOS ANGELES USD, CALIFORNIA

Since I Became a Tutor

The first day I was introduced to the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program was September 7, 2018, on a Friday. When I was offered this life-changing course, the first thing I did was call my mom. My mom is a foreigner just like me, so this meant a lot. She has worked so hard and seeing a member of the household that she's built prosper is more than she can ask for. At first, I wasn't scared because I had tutored before but on a much smaller scale. The closer the days got, the more anxious I became.

This program has had a drastic effect on my education. Before I was a tutor, my grades weren't so good, and I was close to failing the most important subjects: math and English. I apply everything I learn while helping kids to everything I do. I have learned about responsibility because I am a mentor to all of the kids before me. Most importantly my commitment has improved like no other. I am very disoriented, and I used to be careless at times but now I know I have to commit to finish the things I start.

I've never known much about kids. I am the youngest in my family. I didn't understand the true meaning of tutoring, but now I do. Tutoring isn't just helping kids find an answer. It's building a bond with your tutees because that is how you gain a kid's trust. I have three tutees, and I am so genuinely happy that I know exactly why I'm helping them and how to help them because they are the three things I've cared the most about in a long time. One of my tutees deals with behavior issues. Another tutee deals with motivation issues, and my other tutee deals with reading issues. I love knowing that I am making a difference in these kids' lives by motivating them daily and making simple reminders, such as "Good Job," and seeing how these reminders lift their spirits. When I first met my tutees and the classroom that I was

tutoring in, I was nervous, especially because I will be teaching my kids English. English really doesn't bring good memories since I struggled when I was their age to learn English and was embarrassed to speak it because I had an accent.

Being a teacher seems like an easy task, well it isn't one bit. I was scared to teach because I know I don't have much patience. I didn't want to be mean. I didn't want them to cry. A lot of these thoughts rushed through my head because I knew so much could happen. But that's why my lessons before tutoring were so helpful because I knew what to do in any situation. These lessons made me confident while teaching. For instance, I learned how to break down math problems in order to make it easier for them to understand. This also made me a better tutor, because in order to teach something I need to know how to do it myself. It also made me a better student because I can apply these strategies in my own classes. I have learned throughout this whole process that every kid is different, but each is unique and amazing.

The Coca Cola Valued Youth Program made me strong, wise and definitely more confident. I know this program will even change the way I will be with my kids in the future. I have learned a lot about kid behavior. I will be thinking about picking education as my career. I feel like it was what I was meant to do. It won't be easy, but nothing that is worth trying for is.



IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2019 Essay Contest Winner: Middle School Third Place



Miranda Torres

8TH GRADE

DWIGHT MIDDLE SCHOOL, SOUTH SAN ANTONIO ISD, TEXAS

Have you heard about the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program? Well if you haven't, it is a program to help students comprehend what they are learning. It is a program to help students going down the wrong path to get back on track. We are hired to help teachers that cannot tend to all of the students at the same time, so that's where I step in to help. But while I'm helping the students, I'm also helping myself at the same time.

Therefore, it's an inspiration not only to me but also to the students I am tutoring, as I'm used to always being the student but never the teacher. The tutees (as we like to call the elementary students) look up to me, and it gives me a great sense of being needed, as if I'm important to someone. It feels really good to not only teach but also see them happy, smiling and having a good time learning with me. I enjoy going to Price Elementary, so I give a lot of effort to go, and I even look forward to it. I also changed

for the better because if I misbehave, I can't go to see my students. I have even been told that they ask for me when I'm out sick from school. That makes me feel special and good inside. My favorite part is when they are sounding out the words I'm teaching, and I can tell that my being there is making progress with them learning little by little.

It has crossed my mind as a little girl to grow up and be a doctor or a lawyer, but it has never crossed my mind to become an educator. But now that I have had a taste of what it feels like, I would love to be a teacher on a daily basis. To make a difference in someone's life. It is the best feeling in the world!



IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2019 Essay Contest

Honorable Mentions

High School Honorable Mentions



Ariana Suchil

12TH GRADE
ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL, ECTOR
COUNTY ISD, TEXAS



Deyonna Hernández

9TH GRADE
SOUTH SAN ANTONIO HIGH SCHOOL,
SOUTH SAN ANTONIO ISD, TEXAS

Middle School Honorable Mentions



Frank Cerda

8TH GRADE
ROBERT C. ZAMORA MIDDLE SCHOOL,
SOUTH SAN ANTONIO ISD, TEXAS



Hameem Ahmed

8TH GRADE
NEW OPEN WORLD ACADEMY,
LOS ANGELES USD, CALIFORNIA



Sarah Peterson

7TH GRADE
CARSTENS ACADEMY OF AQUATIC
SCIENCE AT REMUS, DETROIT PUBLIC
SCHOOLS COMMUNITY DISTRICT



Paula Olivo

8TH GRADE
DWIGHT MIDDLE SCHOOL, SOUTH
SAN ANTONIO ISD

IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2019 Essay Contest

Academy and Elementary Winners

Academy School Winner

Charles C Ball Academy, San Antonio ISD, Texas

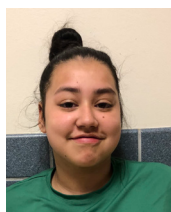


First Place
Amber Ortiz
8th GRADE

“I was always planning to drop out of school and give up at everything, because I’d try and try to get good grades even though I didn’t understand. I never asked for help... But one day I got noticed by the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. I was one of the chosen kids... This has made an impact on me because I’m coming to school every day now. This also helps me with my grades... I’ve been making my parents proud... Even when things are hard, I keep trying now, and I want these kids to do the same thing to have a good future when they grow up. So once they walk up to that stage, they will be excited.”



Second Place
Selena Luna
7th GRADE



Third Place
Mynervalee Castillo
8th GRADE



Honorable Mention
Lizeth Acosta
8th GRADE

Elementary School Winners

PS94 Kings College School, New York City



First Place
Sariyah Mitchell
5th GRADE

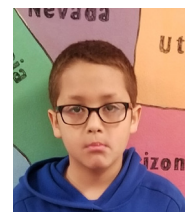
“When I first began the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I realized I had to change my behavior. I thought the program was just about helping kids do their work for an hour. Soon I realized it was much more... Now, I do my best in school because I want my tutees to be proud of me. I want them to do their work and behave well.”



Second Place
Shareef Bell
5th GRADE



Third Place
Aniyah Curry
5th GRADE



Fourth Place
Tyler Gardner
5th GRADE



Fifth Place
Winner Martínez
5th GRADE



Honorable Mention
Jayalah Jones
5th GRADE



The IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is a research-based, internationally-recognized dropout prevention program that has kept 98 percent of its tutors in school.

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, created by the Intercultural Development Research Association, is an internationally-recognized, cross-age tutoring program with an innovative twist. This dropout prevention program works by identifying junior high and high school students in at-risk situations and enlisting them as tutors for elementary school youngsters who are also struggling in school. Given this role of personal and academic responsibility, the Valued Youth tutors learn self-discipline and develop self-esteem; schools shift to the philosophy and practices of valuing students considered at-risk. Results show that tutors stay in school, have increased academic performance, improved school attendance and advanced to higher education.

Learn more at
www.idra.org/coca-cola-valued-youth-program



Intercultural Development Research Association

Celina Moreno, J.D., President & CEO
 5815 Callaghan Road, Suite 101 • San Antonio, Texas 78228

210.444.1710 • www.IDRA.org

