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Margaret Chase Smith Essay: High School Student Essay Winners

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Maine has benefitted from the public service of many well-respected and influential national leaders over the last two centuries. One of them, Senator Margaret Chase Smith, offered her reflections on leadership at a time when the United States faced a struggle for civil rights at home and the tensions of the Cold War abroad. With the country currently confronting challenges such as the threat of terrorism, ongoing tensions in the Middle East, and the taint of corporate scandals, the Margaret Chase Smith Library in Skowhegan invited Maine high school students over this past year to reflect on the qualities leaders will need to possess in order to be more effective in the twenty-first century.

We feature in this issue three outstanding examples of the essays submitted by Maine students. In the order they are featured, the essays were awarded first, second, and third place. All of this year's prize winners are seniors heading to college in the upcoming year; all contributed essays that not only heed the lessons of the past but also draw upon historical examples of outstanding leadership.

The Margaret Chase Smith Essay Contest is sponsored each year by the Margaret Chase Smith Library. Interested students may contact the library directly.



FIRST PLACE ESSAY

What Qualities Will Leaders Need to Possess in Order to be Effective in the Twenty-first Century?

by Emily Parker

In his study of Harry S. Truman in *Character Above All*, David McCullough writes, "Character counts in the presidency more than any other single quality. It is more important than how much the President knows of foreign policy or economics or even about politics." The character of a president greatly affects his leadership, and the three presidents Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, and Dwight D. Eisenhower all had character strengths and weaknesses, both unique and shared, that dictated the leadership of each. All had confidence in the American people and democracy, a

profound sense of history and tradition, and all were successful because they were true to their characters. As a result of their shared trait of confidence, all three presidents could make widely impacting and controversial decisions and then remain unfazed by criticism. As effective leaders, their presence is still felt today, and as the United States moves into the troublesome and trying time of war, we hope President Bush and all our nation's leaders may emulate the same traits of these former presidents.

During one of the nation's most trying times, Franklin Delano Roosevelt possessed the invaluable leadership gift of inspiration. Roosevelt's constant message to the American people of a better time coming reflected his personal vendetta for triumph over hardship. Doris Kearns Goodwin has described Roosevelt as "leading the people step by step." FDR recognized that the Depression had left the American people angry and frightened, and he successfully responded by stimulating an active dialogue with the public while still maintaining the dignity of his office. His famous "fireside chats," coupled with Eleanor Roosevelt's constant crusades, helped FDR connect with a people who came to appreciate their leader's straightforwardness. As the United States faces the twenty-first century, a time when technology has molded us into a nation accustomed to

constant, instant information, our nation will expect leaders to consistently share decisions and policies, to speak the truth and help us make individual and conscientious decisions.

Harry S. Truman shared this courage. At one World War I battle, Germans opened fire against Truman and his troops, and Truman was thrown and nearly crushed by his horse. Seeing his panicked troops fleeing, Truman called them back with a tirade full of profanity...and back they came. Thirty years later at the 1948 Democratic National Convention, Truman again used a few words well, and roused the skeptical and downtrodden audience to its feet. While the American public was comforted by FDR's stirring chats, Truman resisted any ambiguity in his speeches and decisions—a weakness of FDR—maintained to keep the peace. When Truman took office, Americans found themselves awakened from the pleasant spell of Roosevelt's appealing eloquence. Despite his lack of presence, Truman liked who he was. Like FDR, he relied on his background to shape his decisions, which he faced head-on. In a highly unpopular move, the president fired General Douglas MacArthur, then deemed the decision a simple one. He dropped the atomic bomb on Japan and then refused to repeat in Korea. He ordered American troops to remain in Berlin during the 1948 crisis. When George Marshall, whom Truman held in high regard, advised against recognition of Israel, Truman did so anyway and moved on to the next problem. This impressive ability to think through a decision, make it with confidence, and then stand by that decision, is a quality we respect in leaders, even if the decision is far from popular. Twenty-first century leaders will need to possess

Truman's unwavering and steadfast personal conviction to effectively guide a nation in the midst of fast-paced turmoil, such as the current war being fought in Iraq.

This remarkable confidence appeared in the presidencies of FDR and Truman, as well as that of Dwight D. Eisenhower. The former small-town Kansas boy refused to deceive or trick the French in North Africa in fall 1942. Consequently, he gained France's trust, and Eisenhower certainly realized the power of two-way trust. By avoiding difficult language and remote terminology he gained a rapport with officials and the public. He also shared the absolute faith in democracy and commitment to its survival that his two predecessors had advocated. He rose above emotion and sent troops into Little Rock, Arkansas to defend integration, resisted a huge temptation to utilize the bomb, avoided war with China, and advocated fair play in defending Egypt. Like Truman, Eisenhower's motto was simplicity and honesty derived from his farm-boy roots. As FDR had done, Ike tried to always assume the best about people, and the nation responded to his exuberance. All three presidents demonstrate that a leader must have faith in the system that elects him and allows him to



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govern. We need leaders who stand by the principles of democracy as our nation grows older.

Eisenhower consistently strove to remember that he would be lost without the aid of others; Roosevelt inspired a depressed nation with a balance of compassion and determination; and Truman possessed and preserved a courage that helped him make unpopular decision and resist taking the easy way out. All three men led differently, in a testament to their varying beliefs and background. Their greatness reflected the strength of their leadership, a leadership that embodied America and its citizens. The future is never certain, and it is likely that in a hundred years, moving into

the twenty-second century, others will expound upon the greatness of the past century's select few whose commitment and passion for democracy secured them a spot in history as truly superior leaders. 🐉

SECOND PLACE ESSAY

Shaping the Earth: Leaders of the Future

by Rachel Culley

Great leaders, kings, prime ministers, Captains, chiefs and presidents have defined history. Their decisions have enormous implications for the people they represent, and their actions dictate the course of events around the world. With the advent of the twenty-first century and the spread of globalization, it is essential to determine the characteristics of a good leader. An examination of historic leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Maine Senator Margaret Chase Smith reveals certain similar qualities.

These leaders operate with integrity and strength of conscience; they do not make decisions based on political expediency, but rather on their moral convictions. They demonstrate a commitment to diplomacy and nonviolence as a means of conflict resolution. Such leaders exemplify the values of honesty and bravery—they speak their minds, and are direct in their dealings with all people. Peace hero Nelson Mandela explained how he dealt with his political enemies: “I knew the best way to disprove them was simply to be direct and honest about everything.”

Today’s world is rife with possibilities for corruption and unethical behavior, whether it is illegal campaign contributions, corporate duplicity or political

dishonesty. Maine Senator Margaret Chase Smith exemplified the moral rectitude and political conscience that define a great leader. The only woman in the United States Senate, she was nevertheless determined to speak her mind. On June 1, 1950, she delivered a “Declaration of Conscience” on the Senate floor, repudiating the sensationalist, anti-Communist speeches of fellow Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy. She derided the hysteria they created, and questioned the validity of such a campaign, criticizing both political parties for their behavior. She stated: “It is high time that we stopped thinking politically as Republicans and Democrats . . . and started thinking patriotically as Americans about national security based on individual freedom. It is high time that we all stopped being tools and victims of totalitarian techniques . . . that, if continued here unchecked, will surely end what we have come to cherish as the American way of life.”

Senator Smith’s decision to challenge her own political party and speak out against McCarthy’s insidious and unethical campaign was described as “Morally right and politically wrong.” The subsequent attack on McCarthy’s incendiary tactics and paranoid speeches was largely a result of her moral conviction and determination. President Truman declared: “The Declaration of Conscience was one of the finest things that has happened here in Washington in all my years in the Senate and the White House.” Margaret Chase Smith is remembered in Maine, and throughout the nation, for her bravery, perseverance, and strength of conscience.

Great leaders must also face the threat of violence and war. Today, America is embroiled in a war with Iraq, and recently completed a military attack on Afghanistan. War has played an inte-

gral role in politics throughout history, and continues to do so today. Yet it is essential that our leaders do not dedicate themselves solely to the pursuit of war.

No leader better exemplifies the ideals of nonviolence and coexistence than former South African president and national hero Nelson Mandela. Despite spending almost a quarter-century imprisoned for his opposition to the apartheid government, Mandela denounced violent resistance. He led his country to freedom through the channels of diplomacy and peaceful protest. In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, he explains: “I know that people expected me to harbor anger towards whites. But I had none . . . I wanted South Africa to see that I loved even my enemies while I hated the system that turned us against one another.” When he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993, Mandela recalled the importance of diplomatic cooperation: “To make peace with one’s enemy, one must work with that enemy, and that enemy becomes one’s partner.”

The philosopher George Santayana once stated: “Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it.” It is imperative that the leaders of tomorrow are attuned to the voices of the past. The lessons of history are invaluable in determining the course of the future. One only need examine the lessons of the two World Wars to understand the importance of this message. A great leader should remember the atrocities of the past—the Holocaust, ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—in order to identify modern-day parallels, such as the current genocide in the Sudan. In times of war and terrorism, it is important to remember history while confronting modern issues.

Similarly, it is clear that a leader must possess a strong grasp of international

events, issues and politics. An understanding of global issues, international dynamics and relations between nations is vital to making informed decisions. Former American President Jimmy Carter is an example of a leader who works to promote interstate understanding, and foster humanitarian efforts on a global scale. Through his diplomatic efforts and work with international aid organizations, he has promoted understanding and humanitarian relief around the world, winning the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize. In a time when terrorism and hatred threaten security on a global scale, it is especially important to promote an understanding of different countries, religions and cultures and encourage the leaders of all nations to take an active role in the work of compassion.

Throughout history, great leaders have sustained a belief in the ability of an individual to effect change. American philanthropist John D. Rockefeller famously stated: "I believe in the supreme worth of the individual." Maine Senator George Mitchell created a successful and comprehensive peace agreement for Ireland,



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best example of a leader who planned for the future. In 1993, he founded the Seeds of Peace International Camp and Program for Coexistence in Otisfield, Maine for children from war-torn countries to work for peace. Every summer, the best and brightest students from regions such as the Middle East, the Balkans, Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan arrive at Seeds of Peace to meet their "enemy," and work

creating new hope for an entire region. Mahatma Gandhi championed India's struggle for freedom through a method of direct social action. His "Satyagraha" movement emphasized nonviolence, personal courage and truth. In a similar fashion, Nelson Mandela called for a "movement towards a nonracial, united and democratic South Africa based on one-person one-vote." It is the duty of great leaders to protect the rights of the individual—the basic tenets of freedom, civil liberties and democratic representation in the affairs of the nation.

All of these qualities are important, but they are useless without a future. Children represent the continuation of national efforts at freedom and liberty; they represent the future leaders, congressmen, teachers, generals and soldiers of the world. Gandhi understood this: "If we are to reach real peace in this world, we shall have to begin with the children." The late American journalist John Wallach is the

best example of a leader who planned for the future. In 1993, he founded the Seeds of Peace International Camp and Program for Coexistence in Otisfield, Maine for children from war-torn countries to work for peace. Every summer, the best and brightest students from regions such as the Middle East, the Balkans, Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan arrive at Seeds of Peace to meet their "enemy," and work

for coexistence. When they return to their schools and communities, they know that "the enemy has a face," and will continue to work for understanding and peace. John Wallach was truly a leader with a vision—he believed that children were the winds of change.

These qualities are eclectic, complicated and often difficult to realize. This does not make them any less important. Tenacity, intelligence, bravery, determination and conviction are hallmarks of great leadership, but fail to describe every great leader. As we move into a troubled new century in an increasingly connected world, we need leaders who can effectively respond to troubles on an international scale, which requires flexibility, patience, and cultural fluency.

Leaders will need to do more than unite and mobilize their own country; their political decisions must transcend national borders and interests. They must avoid a simplistic, short-term approach to the complex, often ambiguous problems of the modern world. An examination of past great leaders provides inspiration for the leaders of tomorrow. The qualities of integrity, honesty, diplomacy and coexistence, global awareness and attention to the future are timeless and supremely valuable. From these "character building blocks" we can choose the leaders who will guide our communities, states and our nation in the twenty-first century and beyond. 🐉

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THIRD PLACE ESSAY

Leadership— Conviction and Action

by Miles Kirby

Donald McGannon once said, "Leadership is action, not position." This neatly encapsulates what it means to be a leader. It is a popular misconception in today's society to think of leaders as just people in a position of authority. Although those in authority are certainly in a position of leadership, there are many other kinds of leaders. For example, someone can be a leader simply by living his or her life in such a way that it is an example for others. Sometimes it is the things not done and not said that other people can look up to and emulate.

A leader must have a strong sense of direction. Without a moral compass and a sense of ethics, a leader's actions will inevitably fail. A person's actions reveal the most about what he or she really believes and what they truly desire. That is not to say that a leader must be perfect; a leader should strive for perfection, while admitting their imperfections and errors along the way.

Independence is also a necessity, but along with this the leader must be able to relate to and cooperate with his or her peers. If there is not a healthy relationship between the leader and those that are being led, little will be accomplished. An effective leader must gain the respect of others through consistency, integrity, and confidence.

A leader must also have vision. He or she must be able to peek into the future and communicate to everyone what he or she envisions for change. In order to lead people, whether physically or intellectually, a leader must know the destination. The leader must also know how to get there. If the leader gets lost, he or she must know how to ask for directions and take instruction. Humility and flexibility are therefore two integral attributes for all leaders with a vision.

A leader must act, for it is not enough to simply talk. Plans are useless if they are not acted upon. For the silent leader who leads by example, his testimony lies in how he acts each day and what he does, in public and in private. For the leader in public office, promises should be kept and duties should be fulfilled.

Finally, the leader must strive to create more leaders. The leaders of today have a responsibility to inspire the next generation of leaders. Leadership is a tool, not a weapon. The leader must use it with assertiveness and propriety, while remembering to show others how to use it as well. Tomorrow's leaders must be developed by the leaders of today in order to ensure that the vision and progress toward a better world continues.

In order to see these attributes of leadership acted out, we must look at the leaders of the past. We must understand why they were successful, why people followed them, and why they were able to accomplish what they accomplished. We must learn from their mistakes. History contains civilization's greatest moments but also contains its greatest tragedies. At the forefront of these moments were leaders. By looking at the lives of past leaders, the future leaders of the twenty-first century can equip themselves for the jobs at hand. Leaders are

not born; they are developed. The qualities necessary to being a leader require cultivation, and one way of doing this entails looking at the leaders of yesterday.

When one looks at the leaders that have walked this earth, it becomes readily apparent that there are many different types of leaders. There are the leaders of countries and huge amounts of people, like Winston Churchill. Churchill offered some advice to visionary leaders when he said, "It is a mistake to look too far ahead. Only one link in the chain of destiny can be handled at a time." Though vision is an important quality for any leader to have, things must be taken one step at a time. These steps take time. The destination must be reached through perseverance, dedication, and teamwork. Along these same lines of enduring hardship, a quote by football coach Vince Lombardi comes to mind: "It's not whether you get knocked down, it's whether you get up." This neatly summarizes the persistence required to accomplish goals and to develop into an effective leader.

Another type of leader is someone like Mahatma Gandhi. By using peaceful, non-violent techniques of protesting, he was able to draw attention to the social



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reforms needed in India. He became a leader to tens of thousands because of his strong convictions of how India ought to be structured and because of his use of civil disobedience. Likewise, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. helped to lead the civil rights movement in the United States. Dr. King used similar methods of non-violent protest, and he garnered the respect of both those he was standing up for and those he was speaking too. The lessons that can be learned from such leaders as Gandhi and Dr. King are numerous, but perhaps the greatest lesson that can be learned is that leadership comes from conviction, and that from these convictions, peaceful actions must result. Dr. King wrote from the Birmingham jail that the method used [in protest] must be as pure as the end that is desired.

However, some leaders abuse power and use their influence to wreak terror in the lives of others. Perhaps the greatest misuse of power that resulted in the greatest tragedy is that of Adolph Hitler and the Holocaust. Under his control, the Nazi regime brutally murdered over 11 million people. The leaders of the future have to recognize the reality of evil and what happens when power is abused. There are, of course, other leaders who have gone wrong. No leader is perfect, and the mark of a good leader is the one who recognizes this. The ability

to admit mistakes and learn from errors not only improves the leader but benefits the people under him or her. In preparation for leadership, today's young people must examine history and learn from the leaders of the past. There are numerous qualities that are helpful in being a leader, but two stand out: to have convictions and to act. If one looks at the leaders of today and yesterday, one realizes that each leader has both of these qualities. It is with these two elements of leadership that tomorrow's leaders will be able to lead and create a brighter world. 🐼