

# New York Times

## Asia-Pacific Writing Competition

***In an age where unpredictability is the new constant, what can you, the younger generation, do now to shape the future?***

I cannot tell you what the world will look like in 2050.

I cannot forecast whether half the population will still be in poverty [1], or if artificial intelligence will save or ruin us (even experts have varying views [2]). Will half of us be spending our time in virtual reality or Mars, while the rest of us is left behind in the ashes of destitution and starvation, and the environmental disasters we've created, like the Amazon fires [3]? I cannot predict if our world will die at the hands of global warming, or perhaps if we will die at each others' hands in another world war.

I cannot tell you, not because I am no statistician, no genius, no time traveller, or because of the erratic ways in which the world operates. Mostly, it is because I reserve hope that our generation--the younger generation--can do better than our predecessors.

And looking at our situation now, we are in dire need of some 'doing better'.

But where do we start? How can us 'young ones' possibly make a dent in the convoluted worlds of politics and economics that so intricately shape every aspect of the lives we live, and the world we leave behind? How does a gang of "self-indulgent, unambitious, social media- and video game-addicted Millennials", as we are so often called, change the world?

First, we prove them wrong.

Does that imply we have to become vegans, strike for climate change, and devote our lives to becoming CEOs and doctors? Well, not necessarily. I think one of the most important things to start with is to simply better understand the world we live in. A shockingly low number of teenagers nowadays have little knowledge of or interest in the news--a study found that 60% of American teenagers do not [4]. How do we strive to shape our futures if we aren't equipped with knowledge of what is happening now? If only we took more time to explore the state of our world, we would be more interested in saving it.

This brings me to my second point.

I believe everyone has *something* that strikes a chord within them--whether it be about the persisting problems concerning inequality, the ageing population [5], declining mental health trends, or controversial technological breakthroughs like CRISPR [6]. Why not pursue this passion by making small changes in our daily lives? It could be as simple as striking a conversation about carbon-free economies with a friend or participating in a course to learn

more about AI. Then we could take it further, for instance, by doing beach clean-ups on the weekends, starting a school club to raise awareness about global issues, or researching and making a documentary on the topic.

No matter how good or bad or how small our actions are now, every seemingly insignificant ripple we send may coalesce to create gigantic waves of change. Not all of us have to be headlining changemakers or make groundbreaking discoveries to shape the future. [7]

I am no philosopher, no scientist, no omniscient being. I don't have any answers to anything. But I do believe that in an age where unpredictability is the new constant, the way each of us embraces the future depends on our attitudes towards the now.

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