YouthSpeak 1st Place Winner – Raj Sawhney

Racism. Killings. Violence. Trafficking. All of these actions stem from one root word----hate. These horrid actions, are huge issues and as a result are deeply rooted throughout society. They shapeshift throughout our daily lives, taking their form in jokes, sarcastic comments, anger, rage, hatred, and so much more.

Throughout my life, I have been lucky enough to experience words not as weapons of destruction but as vessels of love and care. Yet for most of society this is not the case. For most of society, words bring out the worst in people, and the addition of online anonymity, only escalates this issue. Countless people within our community have faced this problem.

Online bullying is at an all-time high. This begs the question: What must be done to change, to revolutionize OC? The answer-- reflection. After a heated discussion or intense conversation, reflect for just 60 seconds on the words used. Think not only about the words themselves, but their connotations, and the tone in which you used them. If each conversation is followed by 60 seconds of post-reflection, reflection that with which you; adapt your vocabulary, your inflection, your conversational skills to create a hate-free OC. Change would be inevitable.

The best part is, anybody can reflect; big, tall, black, white, reflecting does not see color, it only sees a bigger, brighter OC. As Robin Sharma once said, "*Words can inspire. Words can destroy. Choose yours well.*" This quote strikes at the heart of my argument. We must learn to harness the power of words through the art of reflection.

One person, one word, one reflection, we as a community can change the world together.   I pledge to reflect. Will you?