

WRITE TO EDUCATE

Scholarship Contest Winner

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Essay Topic: How has the place you have grown up molded you into the person you are today and impacted your life?

Livingston County has always been my home. Despite continuing development, the area where I live remains rural. Growing up in a rural area is equal parts wonderful and frustrating. Rural means fewer people per square mile with smaller communities and less diversity. My school is not known in the area for its diversity. There is not much variety when it comes to everything from what grocery store your family shops at to what school you attend.

My education has been limited by my rural community because my school has fewer class selections and availability. For example, both last year and this year I signed up to take classes (AP English Literature and Pre-Calculus) my school offers but I was unable to attend these classes because the only availability conflicted with my other classes. To combat this struggle, I committed to learning these classes online through a virtual education platform with whom my school partners. One of my other choices, AP Biology, did not have enough student interest to schedule the class and I had to change selections. This has been a limiting challenge for me as well as other students in my district. To broaden options, many students participate in dual enrollment classes with community colleges in the area. Limited variety and availability has encouraged me to stretch my idea of traditional school to take the classes that will help shape my future.

Activities like archery and horseback riding are local to me. I attended horse camp at age six and have been involved with horses ever since. Currently I am a member of my school's equestrian team and own my own horse, Gingersnap. Horsemanship has taught me selflessness, hard work, responsibility, and perseverance. Without access to local barns and camps I would have missed out on developing important life skills. My school's archery team was started by another student in my grade who had a passion for archery, the outdoors, and hunting. I joined immediately. In addition to memories and friendships, archery has taught me how to set and achieve realistic goals, that practice makes progress, and teamwork. I am grateful for my community being in an area that supports and fosters growth in clubs such as these.

Despite the lack of variety, I strive for excellence in every opportunity to reach my full potential. My classmates and I help encourage each other in many areas from academics to sports and clubs. A friend of mine created the Environmental Club, of which I was a member, to help promote recycling and decrease wastefulness. She also created Students for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). Our club not only recognizes diversity but we find solutions to problems in our community every day. We spread awareness at school through bulletin boards displaying achievements by a variety of groups in hopes to foster change and inspire others in our community and the world beyond.

With a smaller school population there is less diversity but we do have an inclusive program called Peer to Peer. Neurotypical students are paired with neurodivergent students (called "links") to assist them with participation and making friends. These "links" are often the only friendships these students have at school. I helped encourage my "link" to communicate with me by starting conversations, asking questions, and playing games. Our school is small enough that our Peer to Peer class was able to meet and play Braille Uno during lunch. The more intimate setting including our whole group may not be possible in a larger district. While we may not have the diversity of a larger school, I embrace any available opportunities to learn about others.

I would not trade growing up in a rural area as I feel I made the most of my opportunities and developed skills that will support my transition to a larger college community and beyond.

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