



Scholarship Contest Winner

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Essay Topic: Examine your experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

How has the pandemic altered your high school experience and how have you adapted? How has the pandemic affected your decisions for your future endeavors after high school?

The world has been shaken by the effects of a pandemic and as a high school student, my secondary education experiences were like no other generation's. The virtual classroom caused high schoolers across the world to adapt to a new learning environment. Although some were able to learn more effectively at their own pace, others struggled to connect with the material in the online format. Typical school events were canceled, and students were stripped of the most memorable aspect of high school. Sporting events, dances, music performances, club meetings.

However, throughout this, our creativity prevailed. Virtual meetings, concerts, support groups, as well as socially distanced or limited audience sporting events took place. We eagerly searched for connectivity in a world where connectivity was restricted. The silver lining in a virtual world was being able to go places you could otherwise never go. I was able to participate in online discussion groups and lectures with people from around the world. Despite the enforced distance, people were able to get closer to each other than ever before. Hearing opinions, perspectives, thoughts, and more from diverse people was a unique opportunity that I might not have sought out otherwise. It brought a sense of hope and encouragement to me that the world could still be in one piece despite the sudden shock that the pandemic brought.

Although I was able to connect with and learn from people virtually, not being able to see friends and family in person impacted my mental health negatively. I had just moved to Michigan at the start of the 2019-2020 school year and was already struggling with the transition that came with moving. Being suddenly cut off from my peers once again with the start of the pandemic proved to be difficult and ultimately impacted my ability to make new friends. As a person who relied on human interactions in order to stay energized, I was frustrated with myself and the world around me. However, as time went on, I learned to enjoy my own company as much as I enjoyed others' company. I took care of myself by participating in activities that brought me joy. Whether that be going on bike rides or playing music on my piano, the increase in free time allowed me to explore my interests more than ever before.

My interest in politics especially bloomed during quarantine. With the constant politicization of the virus, masking, and vaccines, it was hard to ignore the political climate around me. I regularly watched the news and actively engaged in political discussion online. The varying views on how to handle the crisis piqued my interest. So much so that it encouraged me to go into politics as a career. The pandemic made me wonder what I could do to help the millions of people who were struggling. Seeing politicians with immense powers not always using them for the greater good encouraged me to be the change I want to see.

Although COVID-19 changed the typical high school experience, it also encouraged greater effort for connection and self-growth within the typical student. I was able to reflect on my interests and goals throughout this period of physical isolation in a unique way. With the new experiences I gained in the online and real-world, I will carry the pandemic's legacy with me for the rest of my life.

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