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8A English

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Olivia's Paper Rater

What America Means to Me

“Freedom lies in being bold.” (Robert Frost)

My name is Olivia and I was born and raised in San Diego, California. If you don't already know, it's on the West Coast. But recently, I made my way to Washington D.C for our eighth grade trip. I was a long way from home, and that put me out of my comfort zone. While I was there, I got the opportunity to really get to know myself and my friends better. The one thing that changed my life the most when I was on the East Coast, was that I found that freedom isn't free, and when that realization hit me, I knew I would never be the same. In this essay, I will be bringing up the topics of what I believe America means to me. They are sacrifice, honor, and perseverance.

Freedom is what we are known for. We are “the land of the free and the home of the brave”. But what we really forget is that freedom would not be a thing without sacrifice. After returning home, the way I viewed freedom and sacrifice was completely different than it was before I left. When I think of the sacrifices people gave for America, I think of the sea of 400,000 gravestones I saw at Arlington Cemetery. I think of the 25,000 people who lost their lives fighting for America in the Revolutionary War. But most importantly, I think of the 1.4 million people actively serving in the U.S military. These people put their lives on the line

because they wanted us to have a better life in our country we call America. Without the sacrifices countless people made for our country, we would in no way, shape, or form, be the country we are today.

The word honor is something we take lightly, but shouldn't. The short story I am about to tell you perfectly describes how I feel about honor. On my East Coast trip, I went to Arlington National Cemetery. As our group was walking through Section 60, we came across a gravestone that read "Ross Andrew McGinnis." Our tour guide stopped for a moment as we gathered around him in silence. After some time, he began to tell the story of this man who lost his life at the age of 19 fighting in the Iraq War. When a grenade fell at his feet, and instead of running away, he didn't hesitate as he held it close to his stomach so the other men would be safe as they escaped. Sadly he didn't make it and lost his life on December 4, 2006. He was posthumously awarded the medal of honor which is the highest decoration for bravery that could be given. In John 15:13 it says, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." When I think of honor, I think of the people in America doing what most of us can't by putting others before themselves.

When I think of America, I think of freedom, liberty, sacrifice, and courage. But what stands out the most to me, is the perseverance of everyone fighting for this country to keep it the way it should be. When we were greatly outnumbered by the British in the American Revolution, our leaders did not give up. They kept moving forward, and in the end, we gained independence. When we get threats from people in and outside of our country that want to hurt us for what we believe, I know there are the people who know what is right and follow what the pledge to our flag is, "...One nation under God." We have fallen into a crooked pattern and I believe the

honorable people who know what is right know the truth. They don't give up and neither will I. This is true perseverance in America.

All in all, this trip I went on changed the way I viewed life and death. I saw the leaders of our country and the hard decisions and sacrifices they had to make for our freedom. I saw the honor and legacies that people left behind. But overall, It brought so much clarity and peace and now I know that after I get through my high school and college education, I hope to make a difference by joining the U.S Navy. I aspire to be like Ross Andrew McGinnis in that I will try to be the best person I can whilst fighting for what I know is right. All of this was because I finally understood what America meant to me.