

Anthony Coates

Antelope High School, Antelope

“Education is the most powerful weapon that you can use to change the world.” Nelson Mandela was an advocate of education, and a life-long learner himself. He also acknowledged that “no one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

From the second we enter this world, everything must be learned: From basic skills like walking and talking, to more complex things like performing surgery or achieving peace among nations. Education not only teaches us how to do things, but influences our perspective of the world and the people around us. Learning happens not only in the classroom, but also in everything we do. Even little things day to day give me perspective in how others live, or exposes me to things I might not know much about, and whether I realize it or not, influences who I am and the person I will ultimately become. Mandela recognized that everything we do revolves around learning and education.

Mandela spoke of education, pointing out that it transcends race, gender, and economic status. Education establishes equality between people and promotes freedom of thought and ideas. Education promotes economic, technical and intellectual development within a society which then impacts the quality of life and the material resources among citizens of a country. Education sharpens an individual’s skills, equipping them to be better contributors to their communities and to challenge the thinking and ideals of their peers for greater good. Education promotes mutual respect and cooperation between people by fostering a greater understanding of the differences between people, cultures, and life experiences.

Unlike many people of his time, Mandela was a university scholar, exposing him to a greater perspective of the world around him. Through education, Mandela gained an understanding of the inequalities in his country and committed to changing the plight of his people. Besides his academic accomplishments, he was also a student of life and relationships. Education and commitment to greater good helped shape Mandela’s vision and molded the leadership skills that would ultimately equip him to lead a nation, promote peace, and most importantly bring people together. Through many years of fighting against apartheid and racism, Mandela showed the world that to create peace and unity we must first understand one another. When people are uneducated and misinformed, it is easy to assume something is bad. When we take the time to learn about other cultures, beliefs and practices, we can ultimately find similarities and identify common goals, which are the foundation of creating unity. Education is the most powerful weapon to change the world because by being open to new ideas, expanding our perspectives and world view, and equipping people to contribute to their communities, we can create change for the benefit of all.