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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Brazilian Student Adriene Mirelly da Silva Wins 2025-2026 Lions International Peace Essay Contest Grand Prize

(Oak Brook, Ill.) — Adriene Mirelly da Silva, a 13-year-old student from Palmares, Brazil, has been named the grand prize winner of the 2025–2026 [Lions International Peace Essay Contest](#), sponsored by the Palmares Lions Club.

The Lions International Peace Essay Contest encourages young people with visual impairments, ages 11–13, to share their perspectives on peace through writing. This year’s theme, “Together as One,” inspired thousands of students worldwide to reflect on unity, empathy and human connection.

Da Silva’s essay was selected as the international grand prize winner for its powerful message that peace begins with compassion and understanding. Living with low vision, she wrote about how her experience has shaped her belief that true unity comes from looking beyond appearances.

“The message I want to convey is that peace begins within each of us, when we learn to see people beyond appearances,” said de Silva, a seventh-grade student at Escola Municipal de Santa Luiza. “Even with my low vision, I learned that the most important thing is not what the eyes see, but what the heart feels.”

A.P. Singh, president of Lions Clubs International, congratulated da Silva on her achievement and praised the powerful message of her essay.

“Adriene’s words remind us that peace begins with empathy and understanding,” Singh said. “Through programs like the Peace Essay Contest, Lions empower young people around the world to reflect on how compassion and respect can transform the world around us and create a more peaceful future for all.”

Da Silva said she hopes her story inspires other young people with vision impairments to believe in themselves and pursue their dreams. In addition to writing, de Silva enjoys reading, traveling and singing in her church choir, and she aspires to become a pediatrician or veterinarian one day.

The Lions International Peace Essay Contest is open to students with visual impairments ages 11–13 and invites participants to explore the theme of peace through writing.

As the 2025–2026 grand prize winner, da Silva will receive:

- US\$5,000 cash award
- An engraved award
- A trip to a special awards ceremony accompanied by two family members

About the Lions International Peace Essay Contest

The Lions International Peace Essay Contest is an international youth writing competition for students with visual impairments ages 11–13. The program promotes peace, inclusion and global understanding by encouraging young people to express their ideas through creative writing.

Lions clubs worldwide sponsor the Peace Essay Contest locally, advancing winning entries through district, multiple district and international levels of judging.

About Lions International

Lions International represents Lions Clubs International and Lions Clubs International Foundation. Lions take on some of the greatest challenges facing our communities and the world through the service of 1.4 million members in 50,000 clubs and the grant-funding support of our foundation. We improve health and well-being, strengthen communities and support those in need, locally and globally. At Lions International, we are serving a world in need.

Learn more at lionsclubs.org.

2025-2026 Lions International Peace Essay Grand Prize Winner

Adriene Mirelly da Silva, Age 13

“Together We Are One: The Truth Beyond Appearances”

Most people learn about the world through light and color. They see borders, differences in skin tone, the lines that separate the "us" from the "other." I also see light, but it reaches me softly, without the sharpness that creates filters and categories. I was born with low vision, and that taught me that Peace does not begin with sight, but with the voluntary blindness of judgment.

The theme "Together We Are One" requires us to look inward. The world's disharmony, wars, exclusion, are not accidents. They are the result of a miscalculation of visuals. Society is taught to value what is large, tall, beautiful, or equal to what is in the mirror. And everything that does not fit this image is, very often, rejected, feared, or silenced. For me, people are revealed by something more intimate. They are the vibration of their

step on the sidewalk, the change in breath before a question, the quality of the silence they share. The color of your skin is a blur, but the color of your soul revealed by how you treat the vulnerable or how you use your words is perfectly clear. My experience shows that the only thing that truly separates people is the distance between mind and heart.

In this universe, we are all made of the same cosmic material. The atom that makes up my hand is the same that forms the mountain and the same that resides in the heart of someone who lives on the other side of the planet. We are the — composition, but we dress ourselves in different packaging. When we cling to the packaging—the visible and superficial—we break the unity.

Being “Together We Are One” does not mean we have to agree on everything or erase our identities. On the contrary. True unity is an act of radical acceptance. It means I value your difference because it complements my imperfect view of the world. It means your joy is, in some way, my joy, and your pain is a crack in the foundation of my own security. If we could, for a moment, collectively close our eyes, we would not see who has more or less, who is strong or weak, who is from here or there. We would feel only the shared urgency to

live, to love, and to protect our only home. We would feel the invisible thread that does not need light to be perceived.

Peace is not a distant destination, but the revelation of our unity. It is the moment when humanity finally recognizes the truth beyond appearances: we are more than the sum of our visible parts. We are one Unique body, pulsating together in the dark, eager for light, but already connected by our deepest essence. And this is the truth I have learned to see, without the need of my eyes.