

**For Information Contact:**

Shauna Schuda  
Lions International Public Relations Manager  
630-468-7075  
Shauna.Schuda@LionsClubs.org

**For Immediate Release**

**Turkish 6<sup>th</sup> Grader, Yetka Yağiz Demirtas, Takes Home the Grand Prize in Lions International Peace Essay Contest**

**(Oak Brook, Ill.)** – Yetka Yağiz Demirtas, a 12-year-old from Ankara, Turkey, has a detailed understanding of what peace is. Demirtas put pen to paper to spell out his ideas for the world to read in his award-winning essay entitled “*Drawers of My Mind*” which illustrates the complex inner conversations we often have with ourselves about what is expected of us, and how we can be the best versions of ourselves each day.

“The Lions International Peace Essay Contest empowers young people not just to write, but to bring their thoughts to life,” said Lions International President Dr. Patti Hill. “Yetka’s thoughtful words prove that the power to change the world lies in not just what we can see, but in what we dare to dream and accomplish in communities everywhere.”

Created to give young people with visual impairments an opportunity to express their feelings about peace, the Lions International Peace Essay Contest is a staple of Lions clubs around the world. Lions work with local schools and area families to identify young people interested in participating and who could benefit from this program.

“Peace is universal, it has no language, religion, race or nation. It's something everyone has in common,” said Demirtas. “Life may not always offer you what you want, but it is necessary to take steps with determination and without getting tired.”

The winning essay was selected for its originality, organization, merit and portrayal of the contest theme, “Dare to Dream.”

The Istanbul Altintepe Lions Club sponsored the local contest that gave this talented 6<sup>th</sup> grader the opportunity to participate in this global event and share his words of peace with the world. Through his essay, Demirtas shares the idea that every person on the planet has a daily schedule, but beyond those day-to-day tasks exists a much larger mission: to be a great student, friend and family member and to live with an open heart and mind, willing to listen, learn and grow.

“I always think about reconciliation; if there is anything that will save us, it should be a world where everyone has equal rights in life and we live in peace,” the 12-year-old added. “This will only progress with younger generations. If everyone knows and respects their rights and responsibilities, there will be a world where everyone lives in peace.”

In his free time, Demírtas enjoys swimming, reading poetry, art and choir and hopes to become a history professor and paleontologist when he grows up. As the contest winner, Demírtas will receive a US\$5,000 cash prize, an award and an invitation to attend a major Lions International event as a VIP. Visit [lionsclubs.org/peace-essay](https://lionsclubs.org/peace-essay), to read Demírtas' essay and learn more about the contest.

Lions International, the world's largest membership-based service club organization, is made up of more than 1.4 million men and women in over 200 countries and geographical areas throughout the world. Lions International created the Peace Essay Contest to foster a spirit of peace and international understanding in young people worldwide.

---

**2023-2024 Lions International Peace Essay Grand Prize Winner**  
**Yetka Yağiz Demírtas, Age 12**  
**"Drawers of My Mind"**

Today I gathered all my courage for a long journey: And opened the drawers of my mind.

I started from the top drawer because the most used things are always at the top. I saw everyday topics there: What to do, study, eat, to brush teeth and many similar things. But these are not the main goals of my discovery. So, I gently closed the first drawer.

It was the second drawer's turn. I said, "let's find it this time". There resided slightly different things. What I keep as memories and symbolic items that left a mark on me. A key that my parents gave me to open the door. However, I never come home alone. Then I realized that it was actually meant to tell me that this is my home and that I am a part of this home. Then I saw the notebook my father gave me on my ninth birthday. On the first page he noted:

"My son, my pride, my dear ... I believe that you will take notes on many pages, like the ones on this notebook, and become a very important scientist. Wish you good luck, I love you. Your father".

As today's twelve years old Yetka Yağiz, I understand that my father gave me a very valuable gift; his trust.

With this understanding, I moved to the third drawer of my mind. This time I opened it with more excitement. And soon realized that it was pitch black. But black doesn't always mean darkness. I looked deeply at the very center of that blackness. I remembered how everyone is constantly telling me that "I can't do it, be careful, it's difficult". Then a glimmer of hope shining in my eyes said ... "Don't be afraid, Yetka! Dare to dream!"

I dared to see through my heart among the "actually blind" who closed their eyes to hope and imagination. I raised my head up to the sky and dreamed. As they said, I couldn't see colors, but I added a thousand colors to the rainbow in my imagination. White is not always bright, and black is not always scary. These are all misconceptions piled up in the drawers of our minds.

I didn't have a fourth drawer. We can't always find a new drawer to start over. But I can fill the empty black drawer with dreams. That's what I'm doing now. What I have done so far and my self-confidence proved that I am on the right track.

As my father's wish, I am on my way to become a scientist. This might be considered a dream for a visually impaired person. But I have the courage to make it happen. I am a good swimmer and a good runner today. Only because I dreamed that I would succeed. Now it's time to continue to "dare to dream", without letting anyone stop me. My journey is full of hope. And it is ETERNAL.