



THE QUEEN'S  
COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION 2019

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**'Hello': A conversation between two  
strangers on Twitter<sup>1</sup> via direct  
messages.**

Topic Number: 1  
Word Count: 989

<sup>1</sup> Social media application.

**THE WEIGHT**

Do you ever just feel this weight on your shoulders?

What kind of weight?

Feeling like you need to do something.

Yes. Yes, I do.

What's your thing?

What thing?

Your thing that you think you should do something about?

Did you watch the news recently?

Yes-only local news though.

Oh. Do you have a thing?

Yes, but...I don't know if I can do anything about it.

You can try.

I am, I mean, it's just there are so many things I want to change. So many things that shouldn't be the way they are.

I see...so you have many things, then?

I guess you could say that.

Does it all ever feel a bit...surreal?

What's 'it'?

The fact that we feel the need to fix problems that aren't ours. I mean, we're not politicians.

But we are people, you know. We have as much right to our towns, cities, countries and every large or small space we occupy as much as any politician does, and so we have as much responsibility.

I guess I can see the sense in that, when you put it that way.

Gender equality.

What?

That's my thing...the thing I really want to change.

Don't you have many things?

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<sup>2</sup> Igbo word for 'hello'.

<sup>4</sup> Malay greeting. May be translated to 'good afternoon' or 'good evening'.

## THE BREAKTHROUGH

Yes, but I think that's my main thing...it really bothers me. Growing up as a girl in this country can feel like being put in a box - and we're all just supposed to accept that.

Oh, I'm from Nigeria.

Yes, I would say. I mean, there's no law saying that we can't go to school or anything-its just a cultural thing that ends up affecting everything.

So, is that your thing too? Do we have the same thing?

Typical. You boys never get involved in something that doesn't involve you. You always have it easy.

I know enough. I know that your thing is probably just something having to do with making football streaming free or whatever.

I don't. I don't care about that. I care about real people and real problems in the real world.

You tell me. I am living in a country that constantly tells me that a part of what makes me who I am isn't good enough.

What? I'm lost.

Oh...that news. I'm so sorry. I feel horrible.

I may not have put on the TV to watch international new, but this was all over Instagram. It's awful.

I get that. Where is 'this country'?

Ah, so there's a lot of sexism over there, is it?

I understand. My sister sometimes complains about that sort of thing to me. Like my father is teaching me how to drive but not her, even though she's a year older. I would absolutely hate that.

No. I mean, it's important and I know that, but my thing is a bit more...personal.

Hey now. That is a gross assumption. You don't even know me.

It is free. Where do you try to stream it?

Oh, and I don't?

At least we have that much in common.

I'm from Brunei. Born and raised. I've never been oblivious to what is expected and acceptable but...a part of me just hoped things would change.

I though you said you didn't watch the news recently.

Yeah it is. And the fact that nobody knows about me is a good thing...but it's also the worst thing. Well, nobody except you now, anyways.

You know it's like that here too. The stigma, the inhumanity surrounding it. Relatives and classmates alike talk about members of the LGBTQ+ community as if they're not human.

And even if you're not directly affected by it, you feel afraid to say anything.

Because it's like you feel pressured to have the opinions and beliefs that have been passed down to you like tradition.

Because, "it's not in our culture".

But the culture does not make the people. People make culture.<sup>3</sup>

That sounds like a quote. I think I may have heard that somewhere before.

It is one. By one of my biggest role models.

It's cool.

### NEXT STEPS

So...now what? What's our role here?

For starters, I don't think we should have our things anymore.

Why not?

I just think it creates this divide that doesn't have to be there. I mean, gender inequality is a problem in my country too, but it isn't my thing because it doesn't directly affect me. Seems a bit selfish.

LGBTQ rights could use a boost - or even some breathing space in the first place, to be honest.

So, let's share. Give me half of your thing and I'll give you half of mine. Maybe that way the weight won't feel as heavy for either thing.

But now its double the weight because we're focusing on tackling two big problems.

Not the way I see it. Look, it's important that we are socially aware and civically engaged, but we are still teenagers. We don't have to save the world all on our own all in one day.

Right, so for instance...you can ask your dad to teach your sister how to drive?

...and you can educate your relatives and classmates who think people who love differently are somehow less than them.

Can you give me a quote?

What?

A quote - so I can quote you to people.

Oh wait, does this mean I'm your new role model?

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<sup>3</sup> Adichie, C. (2014). *We should all be feminists*. New York: Vintage Books, p.10.

Yes, actually. I bet you didn't see that coming.

Who could've? The future changemaker has me as her role-model. Not a bad day.

I'll need a name to put under the quote though.

And I'll need yours so when I see it on the news I can run around saying, 'I Know her!'.

Nnemdi.

Aaaqil.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Malaysian name meaning, 'one who is wise and intelligent.'