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Step Back and Appreciate the Masterpiece By David Frazer Senior, East Lyme High School, 30 Chesterfield Road, East Lyme, CT 06333 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s lessons on appreciation, diversity, inclusion, and equity mindedness come together like a Georges Seurat painting. Each component itself cannot be appreciated without the others. If you stand six inches in front of a Seurat painting one can only see thousands of different color dots. You cannot appreciate what it all means, nor the time it took to place them. Only when you step back, can you take in how each of the different dots of color and brushstrokes come together to form something truly impressive. It's the same with minorities. If you focus on the contributions of one group in society or another, you cannot appreciate the totality of how the masterpiece of equality came to be in the United States. It means for me to not only continue to be the best version of myself in academics, leadership and sports—but I too must recognize the dots and brushstrokes already placed on the canvas, and how they contribute. As one of four students chosen from my high school to participate in the Jewish Federation of Eastern Connecticut's Encountering Differences program, we met in the homes of other African American men and women; like previous Coast Guard Academy's Director of Cadet Bands CWO4 Kirk Edwards. We learned first hand the effects of the civil rights movement and systemic racism from him and others. It is clear we have come so far, but have yet to realize Dr. King, Jr.'s complete dream.

As a biracial male who identifies as African American, I have experienced the defiant echoes of the past—name calling, bullying and mockery as the “token” African American male in the room. To my non-minority friends and family, it sounds horrible. It elicits profound emotions of sadness for me, anger towards the offending individuals, and discussions of how far we've not come. But, I don't see it that way. Racism in all its forms has begun to weaken. At the level of the individual, community or nation—It's clear we've come a long way. I'm able to enter the room. Not so long ago, I would not have been able to enter the building, let alone sit in the classroom next to my non-minority counterparts. The changes brought about by Dr. King, Jr. and his ultimate sacrifice have paved the way for me and countless others. Our unique skin colors and perspectives have demonstrated inherent value across all domains and segments in our society. Entertainment, sports, political office, scientific breakthroughs—no area in American society is free from today's influence of minorities. Whatever our race, ethnicity, skin color, socioeconomic status, age, gender or orientation, we come together. We are the individual dots and brushstrokes on Dr. King, Jr.'s greatest masterpiece—The Dream. Just step back, and appreciate...

