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Student Voices Competition

## **Change vs. Growth - What Will We Become?**

John Maxwell, an extraordinary author, pastor, and speaker once said, “Change is inevitable. Growth is optional.” In this brief statement, he outlines the *major* difference between changing and growing. Change is going to happen no matter what. It’s a factor we can’t control, but growth . . . the power is in our hands--the *people’s* hands.

One of those people is National Youth Poet Laureate and activist Amanda Gorman who spoke about our democracy in her poem “The Hill We Climb” at Joe Biden’s inauguration. Gorman writes, “ We've seen a force that would shatter our nation rather than share it,/ Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy./ But while democracy can be periodically delayed, /It can never be permanently defeated.” And she is right. Despite recent events, it appears that democracy has not been vanquished--just suppressed. But is democracy eternal? The pupa has been made, but it is hanging precariously from its branch of hope. We all know that the cocoon is not the point; the cocoon *itself*, America *itself*, is not what is important. It is what is *inside*, the *people*, the beliefs we hold and the decisions we make, that ultimately determine the fate of our democracy.

Some citizens of America are ready to change and to grow. We have had enough of racial injustice. Enough discrimination. Enough suppression of women’s rights. *We the people* have decided to fight for what we believe in, but while some of us have changed, others are stuck in conservatism. Some hold beliefs that embody tyranny and edge toward dictatorship. Held back by these beliefs, we cannot fully grow. We can yell at the top of our lungs and march across

every city, every state, but until we are willing to develop, to become the republic we were meant to be . . . to emulate the persistence of a butterfly, protest will be in vain.

Joe Biden has selected the most diverse cabinet in the history of the United States--an openly gay Secretary of Transportation, the first black male ever to lead the Pentagon, the first black woman to be Vice President. This represents *America* as a whole. This *is* growth. This is what has been *gained*. However, like a pupa burrowed in the cocoon, emerging takes time. We have to nurture this growth. That pupa will eventually become something we benefit from: a crucial pollinator.

What will come out of our cocoon? Will democracy spread its wings and fly? Will hands of different colors come out clasping one another in friendship? Butterflies do not just emerge immediately resplendent. They have never flown before . . . just like America. We have never “flown” before, though an eagle represents us. We have tried to, but were pushed down by the opinions and judgments and prejudices of a limited vision. But democracy will learn to unfurl its wings and *soar* . . . as the butterfly has always done.