

2022 Lorain County Toni Morrison Essay Contest

Reflect on how your physical and virtual environment has shaped your identity

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In honor of Toni Morrison, this essay challenges us to reflect on how physical and virtual environments shape identity. Toni Morrison lived in a home environment that promoted African American culture and encouraged reading. She was born in Lorain, Ohio, in 1931, during an era where racial discrimination was common. Her environment inspired her to write novels like The Bluest Eye, her first book, which also was set in Lorain, Ohio, and was about racial discrimination. In this essay, I will highlight how my physical and virtual environments have shaped my identity.

I identify as a strong, Black, young man. Because of the environments around me, I have been inspired to love, show compassion, work hard, put family first, and to be myself. Because I live in Avon Lake, where I am a minority, my parents put me in activities that encourage cultural confidence. On the second Saturday of every month, I participate in the National Black Society of Engineers (NSBE Jr) where I am surrounded by successful, Black, engineers that encourage excellence. We also attend Temple Baptist Church in East Cleveland where we celebrate Black culture through Black

History Month presentations and competitions, songs, and affirmations. These environments have helped to make me who I am today.

My school, St. Paul Westlake Lutheran, is one of the many environments that I've grown up in, and I have learned how to succeed in school and outside of school. I am blessed to have been enrolled at St Paul for nine and a half years and to grow in a Christ-centered learning environment. In fifth grade, through the smartboard, my class and I skyped with the author of How to Train Your Dragon, Cressida Cowel. In that virtual environment, she shared the inspiration for and process of writing her book. This was when I started to understand the environment and inspiration needed to write a good story. Also, I am a part of a journalism class and the National Junior Honor Society(N.J.H.S). The journalism environment is a cool class that introduced me to basic videography and video editing. The N.J.H.S is a great way for me to help out in my environment. As a co-president, I have a role in making decisions that affect my community. This Christmas, we held a toy drive for kids in need. For my efforts I was interviewed on Channel Five news. My academic environment helped to shape a Christian Scholar who can do all things through Christ.

From birth until 2020, my church was always a physical place for me. Temple Baptist Church in East Cleveland was a physical environment where I worshipped and learned the Holy Bible. When the pandemic hit, my physical church environment was largely disrupted. In fact, everything was, but my family still found a way to praise the Lord virtually. My church changing from a physical to a virtual environment was hard for me to adjust at first. Now, being a faithful attendant of virtual church is part of my identity.

The environment I've been in while playing sports has been amazing. I have been playing sports since the age of four. I play basketball, baseball, soccer, and track. Playing all these sports has shaped my identity and made me be competitive, agile, and hard working. I carry all of these attributes into my daily life. When I first started playing sports I was an individual player. I was also not good at passing. Now I am much better at being a team player. My sports environment has given me a safe place to develop teamwork, a skill I will always need.

In conclusion, René Dobos, a French microbiologist, once said, "Man not only functions in his environment, he shapes it and is shaped by it." My physical and virtual environments have created a strong, Black, young man inspired to be the best version of himself. Going forward I can shape my environment by doing community service and by being a team player.