

Seeing

Tristan Leitz

Afterward, I looked at the world with a completely new set of eyes. I've always been able to gauge another person's character through a few interactions fairly well, but now I took the time to observe myself. Was I one of the people contributing to the pandemic of ignorance? Had I become what I loathed?

My eyes swept across the halls. I've always strived to uphold a policy of tolerance and inclusivity for myself, but the same novel thought kept perpetuating itself in my mind: *maybe I'm the one who doesn't look at the other person's perspective*. My identity recoiled in shock as I finally began to ask the big question: was I truly the person that I prided myself on being?

I shook my head. *Of course, I was*; maybe I was just a bit confused. But, in that instant, I became a tad more mature. Sensible. "Grown-up." As my mind started to stitch itself back together, a pang of clarity hit me. Everyone believes in what *they* think is right; no one chooses the "wrong" side; no one sees themselves as the villain. My ears twitched as they recognized familiar footsteps reverberating through the hallway—they belonged to a girl whose political views differed from mine. I remembered talking with her months before:

"Don't you see? Healthcare can't be free! Just because other countries pull it off, doesn't mean that..."

Prior to that day, I wouldn't have responded. Well, not properly anyway. I would have chosen an in-between answer—something that would allow me to weasel out of the conversation without raising a debate.

I sighed. "Yeah, I guess that makes sense."

Back then, I never even considered the

possibility that her argument might have been valid. What if she actually spent time researching her topic, and I completely rejected it based on a snap decision? It all made sense now.



Around halfway through my junior year in high school, I was tasked with writing a ten to fifteen-page research paper on a controversial matter. Some of my classmates looked around with an eager gleam in their eyes. Mine looked at my feet, my sunken eyelids partially covering their view of the grey, striped tiles beneath me. *I hate talking politics*.

It wasn't necessarily politics that I disliked so strongly. It was more the idea of choosing and sticking with a particular side. I prided myself on being a friend to all—a tolerant person who looked at issues logically and always found a middleground. Unfortunately, I would have to abandon my comfortable spot in the middle ground for this essay.

My inner monologue mumbled a groan. I had a deep-seated dislike for the "pandemic of ignorance"—as I called it; my idea was that too many people considered themselves professionals on a subject which they have little to no experience or prior knowledge about. *No one knows everything, so there's no point in debating unless you know all the facts*.

As my classmates lined up to submit their essay proposals, my eyes snapped like magnets to the piece of paper in my hand. They read and reread the rough draft outline that I had assembled over the past week. In bold, the top of the paper read "Topic: Health Care"; underneath: "stance: health care should be

free”.

In a nutshell, my thought process went something like this: *let's choose the tamest, most boring controversial issue where no one in the class will find any reason to bring up a debate.* And I thought I did.

Although I was never a hardcore believer in any sort of health care system, I thought it was logical for health care to come without a price. *If other countries have free healthcare, why can't we?* Somewhere in the back of my mind, a little voice told me that other countries have completely different circumstances; I silenced it before I started to doubt myself.

In any case, my essay topic was approved and I started to gather data. The mouse on my screen meandered from article to article with my sleepy eyes not far behind. I let the self-fulfilling prophecy of my viewpoint run its course—without a doubt, all of the articles that I thought were good enough to incorporate into my essay fought for the argument that, in my opinion, was right.

I decided to add one more article to my “pros” collection as my eyes lazily sauntered across my notes page, and; it was late, but I thought the evidence I had gathered thus far was mediocre at best. A few minutes later, I found a document that supported my claim, so my eyes lightly skimmed across its surface. They widened as I began to peruse deeper. As I read the article, a tidal wave of pride and awe washed over me. *This is why universal healthcare is not always the right answer.* I continued to integrate the article into my essay, checking my thesis against the article's main points. I stopped. My eyes shot back. *Wait, this isn't my claim.* I had read through an entire article (which I thought included the strongest argument so far), and I didn't even realize that it was advocating *against* free healthcare. I reread the article to make sure I understood it correctly. *What now? Out of all of them, I agree with this article the most. Should I change my entire stance on the issue?* My eyes looked up, full of questions but shining with light. *I see now.*



Gone were the days of staying out of debates. I made it my mission to spread my epiphany like wildfire. No one was wrong in taking a specific side,

they just generally had different fundamental values. Maybe I was late to the party, but I thought that what I learned was revolutionary.

Afterward, my eyes locked steadfast into another pair while I played devil's advocate; I knew the girl's views differed, but now I was ready to address them. We discussed health care reform as we started to months ago, but this time I held my ground.

We continued to discuss the issue until we heard the bell's three monotonous chimes ushering us to class. A smile broke out on my face as I walked toward my next lesson—at the end of our discussion, the girl and I shared the same glint of joy in our eyes. *If she and I can respect each other and disagree, then what's stopping the powerful leaders of the world?*

I continued to pride myself on not bringing up uncomfortable controversial issues where they were not needed, but now I could respectfully debate with people who did. My inner lens slowly shifted into a wider-angle shot: I allowed myself to be wrong. I finally saw.