

Teen wins U.S. peace prize for 100 Men Reading program

Matthew Albright, The (Wilmington, Del.) News Journal 1:25 a.m. EDT October 28, 2014



(Photo: ROBERT CRAIG/THE NEWS JOURNAL)

WILMINGTON, Del. — Not many people can claim to have won a [national peace prize](http://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/local/2014/10/27/teen-wins-peace-prize-reading-program/18030655/) (<http://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/local/2014/10/27/teen-wins-peace-prize-reading-program/18030655/>) before they enter high school.

But 13-year-old Imani Henry of Wilmington can.

Henry, who goes to St. Peters' Cathedral School, was one of five winners picked from more than 1,100 nominees nationwide to receive the \$25,000 Peace First Prize, given by Peace First, a national non-profit that aims to give young people power to change their environment.

Henry started 100 Men Reading, a campaign that has raised thousands of donated books and organized reading events in which men visit elementary schools, day cares and preschools to read to children. The goal is to help kids learn to read while giving them strong male mentors and role models.

"Seeing troubled youth, I realized they don't have any father figures or their fathers are too busy to really be there for them," she said.

Henry said she knows the importance of strong, caring men because her father and brother helped teach her to read, even though her dad was often out working to support the family.



[USA TODAY](#)

[Nobel winner Malala urges kids to stand up for rights](#)

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2014/10/10/nobel-peace-prize-kailash-satyarthi-malala-yousafzai/16899569/>)

Since starting in 2010, 100 Men Reading has served students in 125 schools. Henry now has her sights set on expanding into other states; she plans to use the prize money to travel outside of Delaware and try to start chapters elsewhere.

"I've had young men and older men come into my classroom, and they've been everything from lawyers to administrators to all kinds of different careers," said Phyllis Woolley, a fourth-grade teacher at Harlan Elementary School. "My class gets to see another version of African-American males. A lot of times that image is not positive, but the men who come through here are outstanding role models."

Woolley said the men usually talk about the books they remember reading when they were young, and talk about how essential the ability to read was to them.

"It helps (the students) understand that reading played a pivotal role in them becoming who they are," Woolley said.

Those interested in participating in the program or donating books can visit the [website](http://www.100menreading.org) www.100menreading.org.

Peace First boasts several major corporations as its donors and is represented by celebrity ambassadors like America Ferrera, Amy Poehler, Mark Ruffalo and Andy Samberg.

Henry received the prize on Monday in a ceremony at the National Press Club in Washington.

The prize brings Henry's efforts to the national stage, but she has long been lauded by state and city leaders who have been trying to boost literacy in young kids, especially those from low-income families.

The State Board of Education is leading a push to get more students reading at grade level by third grade, citing scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress test that suggest only 28% of Delaware's fourth-graders are proficient in reading by the fourth grade.

"We know from the research that if you're not reading at grade level by third grade, especially in our urban and low-income areas, the drop-out rate is much higher and the chances of being successful after high school are much lower," said Donna Johnson, executive director of the State Board of Education.

A study by Rice University researchers estimates that children from families on welfare hear only 616 words per hour at home, compared to more than 1,200 words for kids in "working class" families and more than 2,100 words per hour among families with parents who are "professionals." That means less affluent students have a steeper hill to climb to reach reading proficiency.

Children from families in poverty are less likely to have books to read or adults who have time to read to them.

That's why the state is encouraging programs like 100 Men Reading or Wilmington police officers' "Book 'Em Cops and Kids" initiatives that put books in kids' hands and provide strong adult figures to read to them. The United Way, Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts all have programs to boost literacy in Delaware.

"What we know is that it is important for community organizations to be a part of these efforts," Johnson said. "To see that Imani has recognized the need for this at such an early age shows that it's being talked about in her community, and that is encouraging."


For her part, Henry knows the importance of reading. But she also hopes kids served by 100 Men Reading get a more personal message.

"There is always somebody who loves you. There's always somebody who cares about you," she said. "Sometimes you feel alone, but you're not. I hope I'm helping to get that message out there."

Read or Share this story: <http://usat.ly/1u1E3T6>

Crowne Plaza
Hampton Marina

Crowneplaza.com



Best Price Guarantee

\$68.00

USA NOW



<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/10/28/teen-wins-peace-prize-for-reading-program/18042385/>
<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/10/28/teen-wins-peace-prize-for-reading-program/18042385/>
 Nov 26, 2014 [now/](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/10/28/teen-wins-peace-prize-for-reading-program/18042385/)