

Name _____ Class _____

This Muslim-American Teen Turned his Suffering into a Full-fledged Battle against Stereotypes

Sixteen-year-old Ziad wants to change the way we see each other — for the better.

Rae Paoletta

About this text

Rae Paoletta is a journalist in New York City who often writes about science and young people. In this article, she explores how one teen has used social media. **As you read, take notes on how Ziad Ahmed uses social media to impact teens.**

Purpose for reading

To Learn about how one teen is using social media to impact others.

Vocabulary

Let's pronounce these words together as a class:

Stereotype (**ster-ee-uh-tahyp**)

Tolerance (**tol-er-uhns**)

INDEPENDENT READING

NOTES

[1] You say you want a revolution?¹ Well, one teen is proving that with peace, love and the Internet, you can have one.

[2] Ziad Ahmed is a 16-year-old sophomore at Princeton Day School in Princeton, New Jersey. In the summer before his freshman year, he created Redefy — a multi-platform organization, whose mission is “to boldly defy **stereotypes**, embrace acceptance and **tolerance**, redefine our perspectives positively, and create an active community.

[3] Ziad recently explained in a chat with MTV News that his experience as a Bangladeshi-American, practicing Muslim and self-described “non-conformist,”² largely informed his decision to create Redefy.

[4] “Many people had prejudice and misconceptions³ about my faith, even when I was little. The media paints a picture of Islam, and many minorities, in a way that’s detrimental⁴ to the public’s perception of them,” he told MTV News.

[5] Ziad further described his first-hand experience with bias.

[6] “I deal with prejudice every day and have my entire life,” he said, “from being put on the TSA watch list⁵ as a child because of my name and having to go to a separate counter to get my tickets... to being constantly told I am ‘cute for a brown kid.’

[7] “I started Redefy to initiate a positive change in the world and to fight the ignorance which I have been victim to,” Ziad said. “And more importantly, to fight

Use these sentence starters to help you answer the “Write” questions.

- Ziad Ahmed is using social media to...
- The impact of Redefy is...
- An effect of Redefy is...

Paragraphs 1-7

Write: Take notes on how Ziad Ahmed uses social media to impact teens.

¹ This is the first line of the song “Revolution” by the rock band The Beatles (1968). It’s about how “we all want to change the world.”

² a person who purposely goes against the usual way of doing things

³ **Misconception** (*noun*): an opinion that’s incorrect because it’s based on a misunderstanding

⁴ **Detrimental** (*adjective*): harmful, damaging

⁵ The U.S. government’s Transportation Security Administration (TSA) maintains a Terrorist Screening Database, sometimes called the “terrorist watchlist.” This lists people the TSA thinks might be terrorists. This includes a No Fly List of people not allowed to board planes flying to, within, or over the U.S.

the ignorance which people will fall victim to who may not have the opportunity to properly defend themselves or understand that there are people who accept them and love them for exactly who they are.”

[8] Redefy primarily operates as a website where people can share their experiences with prejudice and post reflections about different current events stories where **stereotyping** and acceptance are part of a national and/or personal conversation. Redefy also shares various stories about social justice issues on its Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Tumblr accounts. Ziad hopes this interconnected network of experiences will unite people through their shared experiences.

[9] “It’s so hard to hate someone when you understand what they’re going through,” the teen explained.

[10] Within communities, Redefy holds workshops for younger students to gain insight into what **stereotypes** are and how to combat them. Ziad described working with people as young as fifth grade as a moving experience. “They don’t necessarily know the terms **stereotypes** or prejudice,” he told us, “But when you hear them articulate⁶ their experiences, they know it all too much.”

[11] In addition to Ziad's role as founder, he works with a leadership team of four friends and 20 representatives in schools around the world advocating for the organization's various campaigns.⁷ As far as the future of Redefy, Ziad hopes to hold larger conferences and wider-scale programs to educate young people on bias⁸ and creating accepting spaces in their communities and ultimately, the world. He hopes the organization will continue to spur teen activism too.

[12] “What a lot of young people don’t realize is that this is our fight. Injustice is our fight,” Ziad added. “Until we all unite in our injustices, ignorance will continue to exist.”

Paragraphs 8-12

Write: Take notes on how Ziad Ahmed uses social media to impact teens.

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⁶ **Articulate (verb):** to express an idea clearly and effectively

⁷ **Campaign (noun):** a series of actions planned and organized to achieve a goal (ex: an election campaign)

⁸ **Bias (noun):** a feeling towards or against someone, usually seen as unfair or without basis