1. Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time.

In my country, Indonesia, many people who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community are heavily discriminated upon. This is the effect of them being seen as a religious taboo. Many would refer to them with negative slurs and discriminate against them from work and school. This motivated me to advocate for them and lead discussions to normalize their perception as people who deserve to be treated equally during my civics classes.

One of my classmates responded in disgust, saying that “people who are LGBT should learn how to fear God” and that “gayness spreads like monkeypox in Indonesia”. Despite this, I was persistent in conveying my support towards the LGBTQ+ community. I argued throughout the class that these people are still human, and that they should be treated as such, and that no form of discrimination towards them should be tolerated. After this class, several of my classmates thanked me for standing up for this community, and applauded me for discussing a topic that they were too afraid to bring up out of fear that they would be outed as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. I told them to stand up for what they believe in, as no progress would be made towards normalizing this discussion about their community. I felt grateful, but I felt as if it was not enough to create change.

In my next civics class, I led a class-wide discussion about a case of discrimination towards a university student who was forcibly removed from their classes due to their identity as a non-binary person. I mentioned how people, regardless of their gender identity should maintain their right to education. There was still a divide in the recognition of non-binary people within my class, but a majority of my classmates agreed that the forced removal of this student was unwarranted and a violation of that student’s basic human rights.

Several weeks later, one of my classmates brought up how people who are accused of being gay in Aceh (a province where Islamic law is enforced) were caned, and how he thought that was an abuse of human rights. When I heard this, I felt disgusted that this was still happening in my country, but relieved that discussion of this subject is starting to become normalized. I felt as if I was leading a direction towards normalizing taboo discussions, and that this was the first step towards progress as a community.

Hi Qimiwa:

I feel your strong will to defend human rights for minority groups like the LGBTQ community and I do believe that you have worked toward positively influencing others.

However, I suggest being careful in your word choice so as to not sound like you are attacking those who believe differently than yourself and doing this respectfully. The prompt calls for a time when you ‘positively influence others’, and you want to focus on that.

Also be very clear in your objective: is your goal for people to agree with you? Or is your goal for people to ‘normalize taboo discussions’ and openly talk about controversial issues? How do you want to achieve that? What greater impact do you want to see in society ultimately?

Navigating controversial issues is not easy and very nuanced. Very rarely is anything a black or white, right or wrong issue. Whatever we believe in and strive toward, we better make sure to do it respectfully and not from a place of negativity.

All the best!