



The Art of Persuasion Op-Ed Exemplars from the Write the World Archives

The op-ed asks a lot of you, dear writers. You're told to investigate and question, but also to assert your opinion. You're told to write something true to you, while also appealing (and persuading) a universal audience.

We have no doubt that you have powerful, worthy, and heartfelt ideas to share. But if you're feeling daunted by how to pull it off—cinching together your thesis, evidence, anecdotes, quotes, and all the rest into a neat package—then take a look at these memorable op-eds published on the WtW site over the last few years. Consider what forms of persuasion these writers use, how they hook their readers from the first lines, and what sort of structure provides a skeleton for their thoughts.

And then get to it! We can't wait to read yours.



Unlearnt Lessons EAurora (UK)

Last year, I lived the past.

It was a school trip – 5 days in France, touring a mere fraction of the countless sites of World War 1. The battlefields. The monuments. The graveyards: field upon field of stiff white stones, bodies lying cold and unknown beneath them. The ground aching with the weight of the world's guilt and the wasted lives of a million unsung heroes. The scars in the landscape, deep blemishes muddied by years of dust and tears; we stood, stunned to silence, and watched the lives of those who were lost flash by in a cascade of names and plain crosses. I couldn't fathom the thought that in the moment they fell, those myriads of men, they were still alive. Their hearts thudded in their chests, their bodies grew and their fears, their regrets, everything they had done and everything they wished they had done still flew around their minds. I saw then the incredible inhumanity of it, clearer than ever before. They were just people, and they deserved better. For a few short moments, we were all incredibly humbled and thanked the world, silently, for all that we had, and all we still had to come. And we exclaimed to one another how something like that could never happen again.

But time moved on. The trip ended. Souvenirs were purchased, photos were taken and information booklets were filled in, tossed to the bottom of bags and promptly forgotten. If any one of us were asked the highlights of the tour, we would probably describe the games room in the hotel or the exciting ferry journey. We would giggle at length about how our history teacher's hat had blown off in the fierce autumn wind and he had stumbled after it down the beach. We might mention in passing the interesting nature of the museums and how it was sad to see so many unidentified graves. But as we drove home, the immediate horror of the past drifted from our brains, drawn away on the wind as our minds filled once more with the future: the exams we had coming up, our busy schedules for the week ahead. And when, on the news that night or in the papers littered



around the airport, we saw reports of conflict – the civil war in Syria, the conflict in Afghanistan, the mindless fighting in countries all over the world – we attached no real importance to it.

The thing is, it is easy to talk about the horrors of war. It is easy to exclaim at the millions of lives lost in the past through fighting, and to stand at memorials remembering, with sombre words, those who gave their lives in the name of peace. But what is harder is to realise that just because it is no longer happening to us personally, doesn't mean it is not happening. We have to be able to look at conflict in the past – not just to the world wars, but further back, to the Napoleonic Wars, the Crusades, the 100 Years War – and realise that nothing has changed. Over time, humanity has achieved such great things: we have become great philosophers and artists. We have made incredible developments in medicine and scientific knowledge. And yet, we still struggle to settle disagreements in anything but the most brutal and instinctive way... through violence. How can we celebrate peace in some places when all around the world, innocent citizens are forced to flee their homes and the only way to have your voice heard is by gratuitous combat? What use is a day of mourning, a day of remembering all we have lost through war, when at that moment, the very people we are praying for are dying in vain?

We cannot continue to live in a world where we have learnt nothing from the lessons of the past. That day on the battlefields, a group of young schoolgirls learnt a powerful lesson. We learnt the value of a human life, and the dreadful futility of anything that threatens that. And we can't be allowed to forget that. As a society, we cannot continue like this, leaving a trail of conflicts and broken lives behind us. We cannot leave a memorial site and allow the clarity we have gained, the messages about compassion and the beauty of peace, to simply vanish. They must ripple into the minds of all those who support war until eventually, we can say that the world is a good place, and mean it.

Or else they will fade away unbloomed: like the lives of so many who have sunk, unfulfilled, beneath a war-torn ground.



Is Knowledge Power? Sze Ann Pang (Singapore)

It's two minutes to midnight.

That is, according to the Doomsday Clock, a predictive model that seeks to foretell how close we are to “midnight” – the proverbial end of the world as we know it. In the decades since the Clock's inception, issues like nuclear weapons, political instability, and climate change have pushed its hands inexorably closer to the apocalyptic end. The future foretold by the Clock is grim. Yet why hasn't there been a concerted effort to address the realities it reveals?

Against the larger backdrop of our chaotic world, the Clock becomes yet another piece of news clamouring for our attention. The internet, along with the proliferation of social media, has exponentially increased our access to information about global problems. We can no longer claim ignorance of the disasters and injustices that occur on a daily basis. It seems, however, that knowledge does not necessarily translate to action. This then begs the question: is broadened access to information a catalyst for change? Or does the sheer magnitude of the problems it reveals paralyse us into inaction?

In some cases, the unprecedented ability offered by the internet and social media to discover and disseminate information about global issues has become a force for good. It allows us exposure to problems we would never encounter in the comfort of our safe, stable communities. It forces us to confront inequalities and injustices, and often creates a sense of urgency for change. The internet has become an especially valuable tool for activists of all causes. Movements are no longer constrained by geographical boundaries. Rather, activists can tap upon an increasingly engaged global community to reach the critical mass needed to effect change.

Civic organisation Avaaz, the world's largest online activist network with 46 million members from 195 countries, exemplifies this. From signing petitions to crowdfunding campaigns, Avaaz members have contributed to major positive developments globally. Avaaz has pushed governments of the UK and US to set aside huge marine protected



areas, took mere days to raise over \$1 million in relief funds for the Haiti earthquake, and forced governments to repeal archaic laws that trampled upon women's rights.

It seems, therefore, that the increased access to knowledge about the world's problems has proven a powerful catalyst for change. Upon closer examination, however, this does not always hold true.

We have all experienced the same swooping dread of waking up to screaming headlines about yet another natural disaster, another outbreak of violence, another terrible injustice. We have all felt the same sense of futility when confronted with a world filled with strife and conflict. Yet many of us choose to remain within our comfort zones and do little, if anything, to address these issues. Why is this so?

Psychology has some answers to offer. In the age of social media and instant reporting, the barrage of bad news seems inescapable. Bombarded with massive amounts of information about everything wrong with the world, we begin to suffer from information overload. This grows into a sense of helplessness—if the problems are so massive, and efforts to solve them have yet to bear fruit, is there truly anything we can do to help? We thus fall back on our primitive mental defences—denial of the problem, and suppression of the anxieties it causes us—to cope with situations we are otherwise unable to handle. Indeed, studies by researchers such as Jessica Fritz have shown that exposing people to news about climate change often has the opposite of the intended effect. Rather than compelling people to make a difference, such news often immobilises them with numbness and apathy at the sheer magnitude of the crisis.

Increasingly, research has been suggesting that overexposure to violence and negativity in the media we consume daily is not only ineffective in engendering change, but can be harmful. Today, every major news website competes for viewership — and sensationalism is often a tool of the trade. British psychologist Dr. Graham Davey, for example, has noted that exposure to violence and conflict in the media may contribute to high stress and the development of PTSD symptoms. A recent survey of 342 Americans has linked concern over the climate—often fuelled by online campaigns and news pieces about the plight of the Earth—with higher rates of depression and anxiety. Indeed, it seems increased awareness of the troubles of our world can not only impact our ability to create change, but in extreme cases engenders a form of existential terror—crippling fear of an



increasingly bleak future.

The way we choose to frame and process the issues we face today is instrumental in shaping the world we live in. At the individual level, we all have the difficult task of maintaining optimism tempered by an accurate perception of reality. In an increasingly turbulent world, we all have to learn how to process unpleasant information. We have to learn to give ourselves space to think constructively about opportunities for change, rather than allow ourselves to be crippled by the knowledge of what is happening in the world around us.

For this to happen, however, journalists and activists also have a role to play. Our culture needs to move towards a more positive form of reporting, one that celebrates the gains and progress made, rather than overemphasising the blood and guts of the issues just for 'clicks'. Instead of relying on apocalyptic predictions, activism needs to truly empower people by helping them find concrete ways to make a difference—something we must all bear in mind as we advocate for causes we care deeply about.

Doing so is vital— it allows the benefits of the internet and social media—mass mobilisation that transcends boundaries of space and time—to be maximised, and the psychological dangers of apathy, stress, and anxiety to be kept at bay. Then, and only then, will our newfound knowledge about the world not compromise our wellbeing, but empower us to take action.

After all, it's never too late to turn back the clock.

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What The Tragedy of Charlottesville Can Teach Us About Grappling With a Racist Past Noran Shalby (US)

This past summer, a tumultuous white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, fueled by enmity and prejudice, deeply unsettled the fragile racial paradigm of our nation. The “Unite the Right” rally was organized to protest the city’s removal of the statue of Confederate leader, Robert E. Lee, but quickly developed into a violent dispute. The protesters had initially gathered on August 11 and marched upon the University of Virginia, equipped with torches and chanting fascist slogans, including the notorious Nazi mantra, “Blood and Soil.” On August 12, these white nationalists regathered and clashed violently with counter-demonstrators. Though police intervened almost immediately after violence broke out, one of the white nationalist protesters drove his car into a crowd of counter-demonstrators, resulting in the tragic death of 36 year-old legal assistant, Heather Heyer, who was described as a “fierce advocate for love and equality” by her colleague, according to The Washington Post. For most Americans, this violent Charlottesville dispute only confirmed the antipathy of our nation, and how our racist past and its implications



continue to burden our nation. But the larger challenges transcend the scope of these mere observations; we must question relentlessly the significance of these symbols and how we can represent our history in a way that unifies us as Americans.

To fully comprehend what happened in Charlottesville, it is essential to understand that symbols are paramount to our society. The symbols we use to represent ourselves can be seen as primary indicators of our values. Whether they are in public parks or learning institutions, in many instances, symbols enhance our sense of community by uniting us on a common ground. Our national flag is a perfect example. For some Americans, the flag is a symbol to celebrate and revere because it represents liberty, equal opportunity, and freedom. Yet not every American identifies with the national flag in that same way. Its significance to each American is as different and diverse as Americans themselves. The same logic can ultimately be applied to the controversy surrounding the removal of Confederate monuments and statues because not every American ascribes the same principles to these historical commemorations. However, the ongoing efforts to determine what these statues really represent, and what we could possibly achieve in removing them, offers many truths and vital perspectives we could utilize moving forward.

Charlottesville mayor, Michael Signer, provides one interpretation of these statues' significance. Signer disclosed the reasoning behind his vote against the removal of the city's Robert E. Lee statue in an early May 2017 publication for *The Washington Post*. Mayor Signer argued that while the "dishonorable" Confederate cause should not be esteemed in any regard, such "erasure" of the brutal reality of the Confederate South will never compensate for the transgressions of our past. He insisted that eradicating these vestiges of racial segregation undermines the African-American struggle for equality. In an effort to secure credibility, likely because, as a white mayor, he realized he cannot convincingly speak on behalf of the struggle of black citizens, he cited the report of a Charlottesville commission titled, "Race, Memorials, and Public Spaces." This report included the contributions of five African-American members of the Charlottesville Blue Ribbon Commission and stated, "Numerous Charlottesville African American residents who have lived through decades of suppression of their history oppose removal on the grounds that it would be yet another example of hiding their experience. For them,



transforming the statues in place forces remembrance of the dominance of slavery and Jim Crow white supremacy.” The report’s main challenge was to assess the manner in which history is depicted in public spaces, aiming to craft an accurate racial narrative that acknowledges the impact and legacy of our painful past. Signer concludes, “[Having witnessed this narrative], I’ve advocated for a third path, [one that mandates] that we neither forget the past nor accept its grasp on our present and future.”

Conversely, many people believe that these monuments and statues go beyond simply acknowledging these figures in the fabric of our history. Vann Newkirk, political scientist and North Carolina native, in an August 2017 editorial for *The Atlantic* titled, “Growing Up in The Shadow of the Confederacy,” argued that the commemorations of Confederate figures legitimize their ideas. Newkirk claimed that as long as these individuals are immortalized in these structures, so are their beliefs. For Southern states, whose Confederate tributes are so embedded into their identity, removing these statues seems “akin to amputation.” Yet these tributes, he contended, no matter how deeply ingrained they are in Southern culture, are manifestations of white hegemony, the treasonous battle to maintain the subjugation of an entire race of American people. Rather than validate the struggles of black southerners, they champion Confederate authority, which many believe to be white supremacy disguised as a celebration of nobility, gallantry, and, ironically enough, patriotism. Newkirk concluded that taking these figures off of their pedestals and out of the public sphere are small but notable steps forward in rectifying the wrong that is honoring these oppressors in the first place; to him, it signifies that the era of racial segregation is over.

The Charlottesville dispute and these individual perspectives caused me to thoroughly reconsider my identity as a racial minority in a much broader sense. Racism, for me, is an everyday reality. I am inseparably tied into the reality of our nation’s racial paradigm. The tragedy of Charlottesville has only illuminated to me the fact that history is not an abstract concept from which people can simply choose to disassociate from because it has formed the thriving structures of our nation which determine how marginalized peoples in our country are treated. For that reason, I believe history is deeply personal, not only for marginalized peoples, but for every American citizen. By fostering an acute awareness of the challenges we face as individuals and as citizens, I believe we will be able to better



facilitate inter-community conversation and identify with one another on a more profound level. For me, empathy is the surest path towards establishing an inclusive nation, unplagued and unburdened by the inequities of our past. In the end, the decision of how to handle the symbols of our past must be representative of our shared values as Americans. Only by enhancing our shared person to work towards a common goal will we demonstrate the progress we are making, as a nation, as a society, as one people who long to be wholly united, with liberty and justice for all.

Op Shops: The Way and the Life. Fyxen (Australia)

The doorbell chimes as a breath of cool air swirls through your hair. The immense volume of clothes is overwhelming; your fingertips tingle with anticipation. The stacks of books and their yellowed pages pervade a curious, yet comforting odour. A sweet lady with silver hair flashes you a toothless grin, and Cornerstone plays softly in the background. You feel more at home than ever.

Too many Australians are ignorant of the bliss evoked by a successful op-shopping expedition. In 2017, approximately 86% of Australians prefer buying second hand to brand new items. However, 83% of second hand items were sold online. This means an alarming one million Aussies are deprived of the ultimate op shopping experience.

Op shopping (otherwise known as ‘thrift’ shopping) is essential to maintain a lively imagination and unfettered creativity. Whether it be turning an old, crocheted doily into a beautiful dream catcher, or converting a retro tea towel into a pillowcase, op shoppers possess an uncanny ability to see the potential in pre-loved items. Op shoppers also learn to see the beauty and value in old things. Regular op shopping fosters an appreciation of the beauty and privileges in our daily lives.



Op shoppers reap the value of their dollar. Once you become a regular op shopper, you'll never look at retail prices the same way again. As Macklemore wisely rapped, "Fifty dollars for a T-shirt, that's just some ignorant [person]... I call that getting tricked by a business". Additionally, 'impulse buys' are no longer a concern when purchases cost a couple of dollars each. If you wear your op shop pantaloons once and decide they're not for you – not to worry! You are only \$5 worse off. If you paid the full retail price however... that would be a different story. Plus, any items donated back to the op shop means the charity could profit multiple times from the same item.

The most ethical transactions are made at thrift stores. The proceeds of second hand purchases help Australians across the country. Throughout 2017, St Vincent de Paul provided nearly 200, 000 meals and \$15 million worth of assistance to families in their local communities. In comparison, wealthy, middle-aged white men pocket retail profits, while disadvantaged factory workers are ripped off. According to Oxfam Australia, only 4% of the price of a retail garment goes toward workers' wages in factories - this equates to 39 cents per hour. It would cost companies an excruciating 1% extra to provide a living wage to those living in poverty. Retail brands such as Kmart, Big W, and Best N Less perpetuate poverty experienced by factory workers. Op shop charities support millions of disadvantaged Australians. Can the winner be any clearer?

Op shopping is an easy and effective way to preserve the planet, as thrift stores have a practically non-existent carbon footprint. In comparison, retail companies generate large carbon emissions due to the manufacture and transport of virgin products, direct emissions from operations, electricity usage in stores, and waste that is disposed to landfill. Wesfarmers¹ have an estimated carbon footprint of 13, 000 tonnes of CO₂ due to transport emissions alone, and generated nearly 155, 000 tonnes of waste to landfill. Of the 300, 000 tonnes of donations to charitable recycling organisations in 2012, 38% was reused, 12% recycled, 10% exported overseas, and 40% was disposal to waste (24% of which was due to illegal dumping). Op shops are an environmentally sustainable alternative to shopping in retail stores.



Despite the obvious advantages of thrift shopping, there is one more thing you should know. As you begin to visit a range of different thrift stores in different locations, you'll notice they've all got something in common. No - I am not referring to how every op shop seems to have a copy of Harry Potter and the Philosophers Stone. Somehow, whether it is by divine intervention or a freak of nature, every op shop smells of dirty socks. However, as you gain op-shopping experience, that distinctive musty smell becomes increasingly nostalgic. After making the switch to thrift shopping, never again will you feel repulsed by the scent of dirty laundry. Instead, you'll warmly remember the times you've spent in a second-hand wonderland - some of the highlights of your human existence.

Quick! There's no time like the present. Grab your hand-me-down wallet and race to the nearest op-shop - before I grab all the bargains!

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Footnotes:

- Wesfarmers is one of Australia's largest conglomerate companies. Subsidiaries include Coles, Target, Bunnings Warehouse, and Kmart.



They Invent Your Opinions Sbaylin (US)

Your opinions are not your own. They are being invented and forced on you daily by big corporations that hide their narrative in the most unassuming place. ‘Fake’ news is a prevalent issue today as news is becoming more and more narrative driven and opinionated. Even the biggest news companies that call themselves objective impose their personal narrative into their media one way or another. Although it presents itself as impartial, most of what we call ‘news’ is partial and meant to influence the masses, and it should no longer be classified as news unless it is truly evenhanded.

What classifies as ‘fake news’ versus real press? The definition of news at its core is a “report of recent events” (Merriam webster). This means that anything that is classified as news should be a report of a story or event that happened. However, most modern media outlets such as Fox or CNN all add distinct narratives to the story to add an element of opinion to it which is more than just reporting an event. Furthermore, because it is opinionated, it should not be classified as news because the title misleads people into thinking that they are getting a factual, unbiased story when they are actually being deceived, and getting a partisan view of the event or story. This is dangerous because people are more likely to believe in something when it is presented as fact. This is why this form of ‘fake news’ should not be classified as news the same way a truly unbiased form of media is.

One of the most flagrant examples of this phenomenon is Info Wars with their host Alex Jones. On the recent issue of the Las Vegas shooting, Alex Jones ‘reported’ that the massacre was, “as phony as a three dollar bill or as Obama’s birth certificate” (News Week). This is obviously opinionated and unconfirmed information, but it is presented the same as any other news source that claims to be equitable and factual. This behavior is not just limited to people like Alex Jones, however, which is made evident even by an article about the Alex Jones conspiracy. The article says that, “it’s hard to take Jones seriously,” (News Week). This shows that even in articles that claim to report on the views of another, there is opinion weaved throughout them that promote their own beliefs and invalidate the other side. Because of this subjectivity, this form of media should not be considered



news, as it is not detached from any personal viewpoints of the author or reporter.

Many argue that not letting brands classify their own material is a violation of free speech. This is simply not the case. Classifying these forms of media is akin to putting a rating on a movie, album or television show. The classification would simply warn the reader that the true intent of the media may be hidden and alerts them to make their own judgements and look for the credible information only. A suggestion of how to oppose this argument is to apply a similar rating system to movies. Instead of the piece not being able to convey its point or not being able to self title its own media, there should be an organization that classifies the articles and gives them a rating based on how opinionated they are. For example, a service like the ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) reviews games based on their level of maturity spanning from E for everyone to AO for adults only. Similarly, there would be a company that would review the articles and rate them from O for objective to P for partisan. This would not limit freedom of speech and press, and it would let readers discern which articles are right for them and which are non-partisan.

Most media outlets that call themselves news are not in fact impartial and should not be called news. This phenomenon is often called 'fake news' and should be distinguished from other news sources that are actually objective. This should be done by the use of ratings made by an external company that is regulated and unbiased towards the source they are reviewing. This would get rid of the manipulative factors that companies use to control their audiences whether for malicious intent or not.

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The Soft Plea of the Music Student Yeo Teng Wei (Singapore)

Someplace, somewhere, on the small island of Singapore, in a school atop a tiny hill along a secluded road, something seemingly insignificant has occurred.

The A-level Music course has been cancelled.

The outcries arising from the student population are few and far between. Their voices have little to no effect on the overall grand scheme of things. There are, after all, only a small handful of students who have been affected by the change.

And here is one such insignificant voice.

I am a student currently taking the H2 A-level Music course, and I am deeply saddened by the fact that my juniors will no longer have the opportunity to study the same course. I have been told that I am far too idealistic for expecting the school to continue funding such an expensive program ultimately for the benefit of only a small, insignificant group of students. They say that I am out of touch with reality, unable to fully comprehend the economic limitations of the school. That I have to face the harsh reality that Music is not and never will be as important as other subjects – Mathematics, the Sciences, History and Geography. But I am tired of music always being the target, the scapegoat, the one which gets the ax when resources run thin. Music should not be cancelled.

When will people finally learn to appreciate the study of music – a pure pursuit for the mastery of a most ancient and pristine art form, of something so thoroughly woven in to each and every one of our lives, a constant source of courage, grief, strength and pain? As famous American poet and educator Henry Wadsworth Longfellow aptly puts it, “Music is the universal language of mankind.” Denying our opportunity to study music is akin to denying our opportunity to study one of the most fundamental and integral aspects of



human life.

The value of a music education should not be underestimated. Studying the history of music gives us a completely different and fresh perspective on the history of the human race – we learn about the shifting attitudes and perspectives of individuals and societies through the different types of music which prospered and thrived over time; how some societies valued simple rhythms and harmonies, while others valued complexity; how some valued traditional tonal music, while others valued the unconventional. Such unique insights into history will not be provided through any normal history lesson. And for an art form so deeply influential in shaping man's experiences, it is no less significant.

The skills we obtain through the study of music are not just confined within the realm of music. They are transferable and applicable to other kinds of areas of study, and even useful in preparing us for working in the 21st century. Like other history students, we learn to apply critical-thinking and essay-writing skills as we argue about the conflicting opinions scholars hold on many controversial areas of music. Meanwhile, composition provides the platform to express our creativity, and practical performance trains us to handle our nerves and focus under pressure. These skills are undoubtedly useful beyond the realm of music – critical-thinking in solving environmental problems; creativity in innovation; maintaining composure when making a speech in front of a crowd. Even for a student who does not continue his music education in tertiary institutions, his education will continue to benefit him in his future endeavors.

If the school does not fully believe in the importance of studying music, then I implore upon the school to think of teaching Music as a kind of long-term investment. In return for the current costs it takes to fund the program, the school will one day attain prestige for raising some of the best musicians in Singapore. Imagine how good it would look on our school record to have students not only excelling in Mathematics and the Sciences, but also in other areas like Coding and Music. There is potential that a student from our very own school could one day be at the vanguard of the Singapore music scene, leading local talents on to the international stage. The school might one day be credited for pushing the



boundaries of the Singaporean music scene.

But I do believe that the school administration is not completely oblivious to or ignorant about the power that music holds. They are forced to cancel the program due to practical concerns – the lack of financial capabilities needed to continue supporting the program. This is understandable, considering the high costs needed to not only employ music teachers (which do not go cheaply) but also to purchase and maintain the quality of music instruments.

But let us not succumb to such a circumstance. I have a proposal; why not let the Music students themselves supplement the funding of the program? Why not let the Music students organize their own concerts and musicals to raise funds? This not only encourages students to take initiative in organizing their own concerts and think creatively of how best to advertise their event and sell tickets, but is also an opportunity to show off to members of the public the creativity and musical ability of the students in the school. Furthermore, it even inculcates a sense of gratitude in the students, as the students pay back to the school using the education and training they receive. And above all else, it is ultimately a celebration of the beauty and power of music.

Hopefully, this insignificant voice from an insignificant school from an insignificant country has convinced you that our school should allow us to continue our music studies. I hope that the school will reconsider its decision, and view the cancelling of the music program only as a last resort in dire economic circumstances. I trust that the school administration recognizes that there are alternatives to ease the economic burden the school faces.

So please.

Let us study music.

Let us pursue our dreams.

This is my humble request.