



# SOJOURN P R O J E C T

## Sojourn Project's Impact on Youth – IN THEIR OWN WORDS

We asked middle and high school students returning from our academic, transformative weeklong moving-classroom Journeys to share their profoundest takeaways.

### What is the most important thing you learned from your Sojourn Project experience?

- “I’ve learned that I cannot be a silent witness and that I can make a difference in this world. Also, I learned how demeaning derogatory words can be, and I will never say them again.”
- “The most important thing that I learned through this experience is...to stand up for what I believe and never be afraid. I also learned to give back to my community.”
- “From this experience I have learned one huge concept: the power of one. One person, young or old, can inflict huge national change.”
- “I’ve learned that language is a form of violence. I had long considered myself a nonviolent person, but, in reality, I had only limited my violence to the verbal realm. I have seen the hurt and danger language can cause and inspire, as well as its ability to uplift and empower. I will not hesitate, not anymore, to use my skill in the language craft to improve the lot of others.”
- “I’ve learned how to live by the Principles of Nonviolence. This is the most important thing for me because it really is a way of life. It is moral and helps the world to be a better place. I also learned that I have the power to change the world. The young people [we learned about] did so, therefore, I am able to as well.”
- “The most important thing I have learned is that no matter who you are or where you are from, you CAN make a difference.”
- “I’ve learned that you have to believe in yourself and that we do have the power to effect change. I feel that the Six Principles of Nonviolence are definitely one of the most important things I’ve learned because they’ve transformed my way of thinking.”
- “I’ve learned that you can’t stand by waiting for a change; you’ve got to step up and be the change. This is our time and we can’t stand idly by and let history pass; we have to make it.”
- “The most important thing I’ve learned is that we need to know our history in order to move forward.”
- “I’ve learned that race does not exist. This is not a black and white issue; this is a human issue.”
- “I have learned... that I am worth more than I thought I was.”
- “I’ve learned to be more confident with myself and I’ve become more inspired to do well in school.”
- “I have learned to challenge injustice and hatred in my society by using nonviolence...I have learned that I have the power and responsibility to educate others.”

## What do you believe was most impactful about Sojourn's traveling classroom program and why?

- "Sitting in the Birmingham church, the site of the '63 bombing, I vowed to make a difference in my sphere. So long as violence pervades our world, I cannot refrain from action. Something about those four innocents lost inspired that."
- "It was the last day when everyone shared their pain. It was really special because it's hard to talk about these things with a room full of people. I'd say the room was filled with love and support."
- "The biggest impact was the Civil Rights Memorial because knowing about the people and touching Sammy Young, Jr.'s name is like a personal connection through time."
- "Just learning about all the different people who were in the Movement who we didn't learn about in school and seeing how far they went. Being in the surroundings of historical places makes it real, tangible... it's no longer just in a book."
- "The closing activity, definitely. I think that made me realize how lucky I am to have not had such loss, but also to help me affirm that there is such loss, such sadness in my communities. It raised my awareness and with raised awareness I can more easily effect change."
- "I didn't see that this was really a program about us. When I applied, I thought it would be a history course. Now, I believe and know that it was an empowerment course."
- "Every lesson connected to my life in some way and changed my mind to make me an activist."
- "I think hearing firsthand accounts was most impactful because it showed us that they are human, and we can do what they did."
- "The circle we did at the end of the trip. But, in my opinion, it shouldn't be at the end because it is too powerful to not let everyone talk when people have more to say."
- "For me, the most impactful part of the program was seeing the negative consequences of violence."
- "When I saw the Little Rock Nine commemorated on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I began to cry because I know what that meant for the country. Also, Bobby Kennedy was and still is my favorite president that never was."
- "Touching the names of people who had their lives stolen so that I could live was the most moving because I felt a connection and knew that I couldn't let them die in vain."
- "Minnijean, because I could connect with her. Also, the Civil Rights Memorial, because it is a heavy impact of seeing all of those names. It is powerful."
- "The most impactful part for me was seeing the other people from different areas and realizing we have common backgrounds and experiences, and we are all learning together."
- "The last sharing experience – it made me think about my mistakes and my family and that I've got to make a change."
- "The most impactful thing was meeting Reverend Billy Kyles, because he made me realize that I do have a dream. All I have to do is believe in myself."
- "Meeting the speakers, because hearing what people went through firsthand makes you realize the power of violence and language, and what people went through to get the rights we have today."
- "The most impactful of all my experiences was the Civil Rights Memorial, because it really hit home that so many people gave their lives to achieve what we take for granted."

- “The biggest impact for me was meeting all the speakers. I couldn’t believe I was really meeting these people who played an important role in the Civil Rights Movement.”
- “The thing that impacted me the most was when everyone had to tell what principle of nonviolence they wanted to live by. I think that it was the connecting point for everyone.”
- “I think the most impactful was the speakers. By sharing their stories with us, the new generation, they are giving us the knowledge and motivation to change the world.”
- “For me it was visiting Chaney’s grave, because my brother is around the same age and I want to love him instead of hating him.”
- “I think that the way they related everything to us and our lives was extremely impactful. Everyone and everything was truly impactful.”
- “The fact that he called on you even when your hand wasn’t up and never skipped you, because it gave you a chance to actually look for the answer.”
- “Each story has impacted me. The fact that so much injustice occurred on American soil for too many years is something that needs to be known.”
- “Learning about institutionalized racism and what I can do about it made me feel very powerful and believe in myself.”
- “When we met Rev. Billy Kyles, because he gave me a lot of inspiration to always hold fast to my dreams. He made me believe in myself.”
- “I was impacted by the power to forgive. This impacted me, because I know it is incredibly difficult to do this and it is a testimony to the forgiver’s sense of community and faith in nonviolence.”
- “Sharing the Principles of Nonviolence and the one we choose and why, because I felt safe sharing and it was a great emotional release out of all the learning we did.”
- “When we met Elizabeth Eckford and when we visited the Lorraine Motel. I could relate to Elizabeth Eckford and I learned that Martin Luther King, Jr. was a normal person; he wasn’t perfect, and he was very stressed out during the Civil Rights Movement.”
- “The most impactful thing for me was a chance to participate, because it changed my life.”
- “What was most impactful was actually meeting the people who took part in history and going to the places where events happened.”
- “The lynching was what impacted me, because I didn’t know that they did this back then whenever whites felt like it.”
- “The biggest impact of this program was meeting ‘ordinary people who did extraordinary things,’ and finding inspiration to make a better tomorrow.”

## Did your Sojourn experience alter your perception of the kind of student you could be?

- “It shows I can be the kind of student to get A’s and B’s instead of C’s and D’s.”
- “This experience has shown me I can be a great student. It has also shown me that being a great student involves loving what you are doing or at least being interested. It also means I need to be a great friend and supporter in my student career.”
- “It made me a more determined student, because I know I’m capable of rigorous academic work.”
- “I’ve been a good student, but a lazy one. This has made me think about how I am wasting my opportunity by being lazy.”
- “This experience couldn’t have come at a better time, because I was actually beginning to slack off. I have never worked as hard as I did on this trip. When it comes to going back to school, I know I will be a better and hardworking student.”
- “I will be an ‘A’ student when I get back to school. I will work hard.”
- “I feel that I can be a 10 times better student and not be lazy and get my work done on time.”
- “I totally changed. I now know that I’m capable of anything. I believe in myself more. And now I know that people, such as my teachers, will help me be a better student.”
- “This experience made me believe that I can be an excellent student.”
- “Well, before the trip I was a truant. But realizing that I can do good and I can participate makes me feel good, too. The homework made me feel smart when I turned it in.”
- “I know that I am strong, and I am capable of going anywhere I want to go and be anyone I want to be.”
- “I know I can gain a lot from education. Now I can get in front of a group of people and talk about anything thanks to this program.”
- “I realize that I can get all my work done even if the workload is extremely massive. Also, after having to wake up at 6 a.m., I will never be late to school again.”
- “I can learn a lot if I just take the time to apply myself in class.”
- “I can put in a lot more work than I have been. It has renewed my motivation and amped up my determination to succeed.”
- “My ability to stay awake and survive on so little sleep impressed me, despite being sick. I’m stronger than I thought.”
- “This experience affected me to be a stronger student who is thankful for who she is, and thankful to all the Little Rock Nine, I can go to school and have an excellent education and I can be whatever I want to be.”
- “This experience made me want to stay in school. I just wanted to drop out and get it over with, but this motivated me to stay in school and do it from my better future and my parents.”
- “I know that I am a good student, but I do slack off sometimes. It helped me realize what a great opportunity education is, and I should take in as much as possible while I have the chance.”
- “This experience influenced me to be more loving and to look at my faults before I judge others. It has improved my personality and how I treat others. I will go home with more love to give and filter hate out of my soul.”
- “I learned that I can get respect for what I say, and I feel more confident to be involved in discussions and learning.”

- “Now I believe I can be a dedicated student. This trip has taught me discipline...and to be more truthful and reliable.”
- “Before this trip I was definitely not the best student. I believe that will change quickly. I know how important my education and knowledge are.”
- “This experience has shown me that I’m capable of reading thoroughly through difficult books. I think what this has shown is that that I can read at a higher level than I thought I could.”
- “This experience has affected my perception greatly. My student skills have improved dramatically. I’m more organized and still in my seat.”
- “It showed me that we are all powerful and that we can all make a huge difference.”
- “It has shown me that I am capable of hard, rigorous work as long as I care about it.”
- “With all the work I’ve done and notes I’ve taken, I feel I can work harder academically than I thought I could before.”
- “It made me realize people sacrificed a lot for us to be able to take full advantage of our learning opportunities.”

## Did the program influence your plans for college (60% said YES)?

- “Yes. I was going to join the Army right after high school before I joined this program, but these last ten days impacted me. I can’t hurt other people. I want to do what’s right.”
- “Yes. I was already planning on going to college, but this program made me WANT to go to college and further my education.”
- “Yes. I want to major in something that has to do with giving back to my community and create equality throughout the U.S.”
- “Yes. It made me realize the importance of college and motivated my decision to be a better student.”
- “Yes. It convinced me that I am ready for college, and I can do all of the work.”
- “Yes. It made me want to go to college and do something to help people.”
- “Yes. It encouraged me to go to college and take advantage of my education.”
- “Yes, it did, because education is the key to a better life and I learned that on this trip.”
- “Yes. I want to go take more classes about civil rights and learn as much as I can.”
- “Yes. Before I was going to major in music, which I am still going to do, but now I’m going to try to change people through my music.”
- “Yes. It gave me more hunger for more knowledge. That way I can be the best person that I’m meant to be.”
- “Kinda – it made me realize that I can do good and I can make someone proud, even if it’s just me 😊.”
- “Yes. I was extremely discouraged about college and getting into them, but now I realize the importance of education and my need for it in order to succeed in life and pursue my passions.”
- “Yes. I knew I was going already, but I didn’t think I would do well. I know now that I have the potential to do anything.”
- “Yes. When I grow up, I will probably be a lawyer fighting for people’s rights who are wrongfully imprisoned.”
- “Yes. It changed my mind completely, because I used to say that I was not going to college, but now I changed my mind because I need to go to learn more about history.”
- “Yes. I want to go to college even more than I did because something life changing could happen to me that could affect the world.”
- “Yes. I now see a reason to attend college.”
- “Yes. It showed me that my education is the most important thing I have going for me and nobody can take my education away.”
- “Yes. I was really lazy at school, because I never felt I was smart enough, so I never aimed high. I now see how brainwashed I was.”
- “Yes. I thought that I wasn’t going to continue with it, but this trip has shown me that I can.”
- “Yes. I would like to take specific courses on the Civil Rights Movement.”
- “Yes. I am now determined to try to get into the most prestigious school I can.”
- “Yes. I always wanted to go to college, but now I really want to do this to help people and really contribute to society.”
- “Yes. I plan to use my college years as a time to study the Civil Rights Movement more and DO things to better the world.”

- “Yes. Reverend Billy Kyles said that education is the only thing we’ll always have; education may never be stripped away from us. So, in college, I will never take anything for granted and I’m going to take every opportunity handed to me.”
- “Yes. I plan to keep educating myself about Civil Rights beyond high school and it makes me want to become a teacher, so I can teach the lessons NOT in textbooks.”
- “Yes. I want to take classes that will guide me to be a activist.”
- “Yes. It has made me want to become a teacher even more. I want to empower the next generation of youths and teach/educate them.”
- “Yes. I plan to become a psychologist, but I would now like to specialize in children and teenagers who are affected by violence.”
- “Yes. I didn’t think I wanted to go to college, because it didn’t seem that important. I know now that education is the #1 thing that matters in life.”
- “Yes. Education is incredibly important, so important that people have fought and died for my right to equal education. I feel like if I don’t go to college and learn as much as I can, I’ll be wasting their pain and suffering.”
- “Yes. I did a lot of work and took a lot of notes on this trip, which made me feel like I can do as much work or more in college.”

## Were you changed because of your Sojourn experience?

- “I’ve become a better person. I am no longer going to be a silent witness. I am an asset to the community.”
- “I will be more cautious, more aware, more open; I’ll be a better person.”
- “I will practice nonviolence...I will reach out to others. I will be the change I want to see in the world.”
- “This trip is probably the best decision I’ve ever made. It gave me a new perspective on life.”
- “I will never stand by and let something happen that I know is wrong. I will not be a silent witness, and I know what kind of strength I possess.”
- “I will stick up for people who are in need. I refuse to be a silent witness anymore. I will continue the dream and change America until we overcome.”
- “I’m going to be a human rights activist.”
- “I am already changed. I will not use harmful language or let others use it. I have learned so much about forgiveness and how I should go about it.”
- “I am more positive from this experience. I no longer use the language I did when I came; I will NOT use violence and I will speak up when I see a fight or issue.”
- “I will not be a silent witness and I will have the courage to stand up for others.”
- “I definitely have a much stronger grasp, not only about Civil Rights, but on the concept of nonviolence, and I have more self-confidence. It gave me hope and power to change myself and the world.”
- “I think I can speak up and stand up. This has allowed me to be more confident in school and myself. Now I have a goal in living instead of just living. This goal is to live the Six Principles of Nonviolence.”
- “My whole moral system has changed (silent witness, swearing). I have learned more in these 10 days than in 12 years of history class in school.”
- “I think I’m going to come to peace more with family and friends and not hate, but love and embrace those around me.”
- “I plan to practice nonviolence and stop using hateful speech. I want to become a better person. The change starts with me.”
- “I think I will be a much more aware person who will never let anyone stand alone. I will give much more back to my community.”
- “I see life and the things that go on around me from a different perspective. At first, I didn’t really mind when other people used degrading language, because I used it myself, but now all that is about to change. I’ll have to pass this information on, because it will be wrong on my behalf if I don’t.”
- “I am already a changed person. I believe this trip was just reinforcement to strengthen who I am and my beliefs.”
- “I think I will be much nicer to people and much more understanding. I feel so brand-new and clean.”
- “I think I understand myself more. I know what I am capable of doing and know how to get there. I have met the most amazing people and we shared the most wonderful experiences.”
- “I now believe I’m ready for college; not having my mom leaning over my shoulder showed me I can do it myself.”

- “It taught me a lot about our history, and, to tell you the truth, I was never a fan of history; but I learned a lot about myself and what I need to do.”
- “I think I will be a more loving person. I will be able to forgive, which means I will have a more enriched life overall. I will also be more outreaching to students in need.”
- “From this I know I will never be a silent witness again. I will stand up for what I believe in and in general I will be a much better person.”
- “I KNOW I will be changed in the way I treat people. I shall never hate again.”
- “I think I will be changed physically and emotionally and I think that I won’t get into fights anymore and I can learn how to love.”
- “I think I will be a more dedicated student, a friend who knows his history, and a more forgiving and lovable son.”
- “No more being a silent witness, no more hate words, no more violence.”
- “This trip has taught me to be less judgmental and more forgiving.”
- “I will now stand up for those who are too afraid to stand up for themselves.”
- “I won’t be a silent witness. I’ll take a stand to do what’s right. I am the future.”
- “I will know more of the history of the country I live in and have a better perception of myself as a human being. The Six Principles will make me a better person.”
- “I think that I will be able to do a lot better in school after this experience.”
- “My personality in general is changed; I’ll be more respectful, courageous, and mature.”
- “I think I will look at things with a better perspective. I’ll also have more motivation to do the right thing.”
- “I will be changed by this experience, because I will show more compassion towards others. I will not harbor hatred. Instead, I will turn that hate into determination to benefit myself and others.”
- “I think I will move outside of myself. I feel like I’m a part of a community now and I don’t think I’m going to forget ever the spirit of human unity that we must always be there for one another. I love you all.”
- “I will now use the Six Principles of Nonviolence in hopes of making the world a better place because now I know that I can.”
- “I will be more active in helping those around me and nonviolently fighting injustice. Fear won’t hold me back anymore.”
- “I think I will be more open with my feelings from now on; also, I won’t stand back and watch people get harassed anymore. I am no longer a silent witness.”
- “I am determined to fix my relationship with my father because of this experience. I have been shown that life can be so much better with the Six Principles. This whole trip – even though many of the lessons were painful and sad – has made me happier and closer to people.”
- “I know I will be a better person. It has already changed my language. It is also helping me get rid of my hate. It has changed who I am and I love it.”
- “I won’t be a silent witness, I’ve learned not to hate but to love and I think I will be a more forgiving person and active person in my community – we ARE the change, so I need to do my part.”
- “I can already feel the change. From now on I have Six Principles to live by. I am now a nonviolent person.”
- “I will be a more loving person and I will no longer use violent words that hurt other people.”

## Further Commentary & Personal Insights

- “I want to come again next year, but I prefer to give my spot to somebody who does not know about Civil Rights because it is a great experience.”
- “Thanks for changing my life. I want to be a part of next year’s trip. Everybody should be a part of this trip.”
- “There is nothing like Sojourn. It’s magical.”
- “This trip is very, very awesome. I love everything.”
- “I loved this trip. It taught me about the Civil Rights Movement, how to deal with people who wronged me, and how to forgive myself. This is a valuable experience.”
- “This is the most amazing, loving experience I’ve ever had.”
- “This was the best 10 days of my life and I will be going again.”
- “This is an AMAZING trip that everyone should go on.”
- “This program is mind opening and awe inspiring. I will recommend it to all of my friends.”
- “This experience will stay with me for the rest of my life. I loved everything about it.”
- “I really feel like every person should participate in this Journey because it truly opens your eyes towards, for me, everything.”
- “I really appreciate the opportunity of being able to go on this trip. It was honestly the best week of my life.”
- “Every student who thinks it’s cool to say n----, b----, f--, etc. should go on this trip.”
- “This program has made a revolutionary change in my life. The staff has touched my life and I met some very decent people that I am going to keep in touch with. I love Sojourn and the Sojourn family.”
- “I love the way that the Six Principles help me understand why language is important.”
- “This program should be available to all high schools around the country. More should be informed about this amazing experience.”
- “I have to say thank you for this beautiful experience because it taught me a lot and now I feel like a stronger person.”
- “I love this trip because it makes you learn a lot about yourself and the world you live in. I love this trip because it teaches things that are never taught in school.”
- “Best 10 days of my life!”
- “Life changing.”
- “Best 10 days of my life. One of my favorite parts was the dance, as far as becoming closer friends with people. I’ve made amazing and long-lasting friends.”
- “Even though I have never cried more in my life, this was an incredible experience. I will be a better person because of this trip. Thank you so much.”
- “Sojourn has changed me for the better and I’ll miss all the people I’ve come to know like family. This was a turning point in my life.”
- “I felt more comfortable here than at school.”
- “I would like to say that the staff here is amazing, supportive, and intense. They are into this trip and love history and helping us kids, and it sets a nice tone.”
- “I would like to say that this has been the best thing that has ever happened to me and I am so incredibly glad that I came.”
- “This is the most extraordinary trip of my life. It gave me courage, it gave me strength, and it gave me back my life.”

- “We should help other students come on this trip because some students are bad in school, but if they come on this trip they will change.”
- “This trip has made me a better person. I feel filled with so much love.”
- “This was an experience I will never forget, and I know when I go home I will be a better person. Thank you so much for presenting this unforgettable and life-changing opportunity.”
- “I thought this trip was amazing. I have never been in such a supportive community. This trip changed people. This trip showed people they were worth something and it may have saved some people from suicide. Everyone should go on this trip and everyone needs to. It has opened a whole new perspective.”
- “I enjoyed the lessons and everything – this is a great experience. Keep up the good work! ☺”
- “Sojourn was truly amazing. It was a life-changing trip. I wouldn’t trade it for the world.”
- “Minnijean is the queen.”
- “I extremely recommend this trip to anyone and everyone because it is amazing, beyond words...keep it going forever!”
- “I love the sense of community and love and the strong bonds between the students.”
- “It’s an amazing experience. Everyone should take this trip. I didn’t think it would change me, but it did.”
- “This trip impacted and changed my life, and was the greatest learning experience I’ve ever had.”
- “This trip is amazing. I loved every minute of it. I am thankful that I had this opportunity and learned so much.”
- “It is the #1 trip and educational experience I’ve ever experienced.”
- “This program, even though it was hard work, was amazing.”
- “I just wanna say this was an amazing experience – very powerful. Thank you!”
- “This is a life-changing experience and it’s worth the exhaustion and hard work.”
- “This is a great program. It has literally saved my life. It is educational and an experience that will lift you away.”
- “I never knew how harmful my school was until this trip. I’m glad I can change it now.”
- “ALL students should go on this trip. I hope it spreads through the whole nation.”
- “All the fundraising and work I did to go on the trip are so worth it!”
- “Sojourn changed my life.”
- “Sojourn changed my life. I will never forget it and I will never let my dreams die.”
- “I would love to go on this program again.”
- “SOJOURN ROCKS!!!”
- “The St. James Hotel is fabulous. And I love the teachers!!!”
- “I loved this trip and I will stand up in my community to change the world.”
- “This trip was a wakeup call for me to take action and polish myself to become a better person. Thank you.”
- “I feel honored and privileged to have been a part of this trip.”

And we feel honored and privileged to be able to take so many amazing young people on Sojourn. It’s not about you or me. It’s about us. Thank you. *The Sojourn Project Team.*