

Essay Title: **"Our American Heritage and Our Responsibility for Preserving It"**

Focus Question: **"How has America advanced the cause of freedom in the rest of the world?"**

The sun is setting, the sky is endless shades of brilliant red and faded orange. A man walks along the beach, enjoying the serenity of nature's display. He pauses for a moment, gazing over the peaceful scene. A movement catches his eye and he recognizes the shape of a young girl in the distance. As he watches, she bends over and tosses something into the sea, repeating the action and slowly moving along the shoreline. The man sets off once more, but pauses as he reaches the girl. "Excuse me," he says, "but may I ask what you're doing?" The girl looks up and meets his gaze. "These starfish have washed too far from the ocean. The waves will recede and they won't survive if they remain here." Looking around, the man asks, "But there are too many to save all of them- how will this ever make a difference?"

Picking up yet another starfish, the girl replies, "Well I made a difference to at least this one".

Liberty. Justice. Democracy. Equality. Freedom – America is founded upon principles and ideals that ensure happiness for each of her citizens. The Declaration of Independence states that Americans are endowed with the unalienable rights of "...life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". Similar to the starfish-saving girl's passion for the wellbeing of the delicate sea creatures, saving one starfish at a time, it is America's passion to advance the cause of freedom with the rest of the world, one country at a time.

The United States rose to strength relatively quickly upon declaring independence from Great Britain. Standing as a global superpower throughout World War I and World War II, as well as the Cold War and the current-day war on terrorism, America could have chosen to stay silent and uninvolved.

However, the passion for the freedom and democracy Americans enjoy served as a driving force for the country's history of foreign aid and assistance. The United States has developed a pattern of assistance and support for countries struggling to get on their feet, helping set up democratic government systems and advance the cause freedom in other countries. America continues to provide the same foreign aid in the world today, which causes a chain reaction and perpetuates the ideal of freedom throughout the earth.

Just as the starfish-saving girl represents the United States of America, she also represents each one of us. It is our duty, as Americans, to uphold our country with the utmost respect and to continually contribute to our nation, even by one starfish at a time. A country is not defined by its president, politicians, its government, or military. America is not defined by the White House- America is defined by her people. As Americans, we are the face of the Star- Spangled Banner. We are the ones who can truly make a difference, and who can advance the cause of freedom both in our own society as well as in the rest of the world – if only we have the courage and passion to do so.

As the man turns to continue on his walk, he stops and says, "Pardon me, but it just dawned on me that I never asked your name."

The girl simply replies, "My name is America."