

Virus Under the Microscope

A play-with-a-play for teachers, parents and students
about the COVID -19 virus with the introduction and naming of another virus

An educational story (a play) that concludes with hope
Act One was published on April 25, 2020 on the Brock University COVID-19 Archive
Act Two was added on June 21, 2020 to honour the life of George Floyd

by Robert Hicks

A "play-within-a-play" is a play that is performed in the confines of another play. The general audience is not the intended audience, the characters in the play are the audience. In this play, the characters are terrible viruses. The viruses, always silent, are watching and listening to two laboratory technicians in a research lab in Canada.

Black text is read by Teacher/Parent
Green/Red/Blue text is read by Students

For historical record, COVID-19, was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020. Since then, many regions around the world, including all Canadian provinces and territories, have declared states of emergency and implemented strict public health measures effectively putting cities under lock-down.

The world's reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic is historic. In the near and far future, people will want to retell the history of this challenging time. This is a unique and teachable event that provides an opportunity to tell thoughtful stories that deliver important lessons.

Stories are a powerful tool to increase understanding and build complex issue engagement. American author Joseph Campbell said, "If you're going to have a story, have a big story, or none at all." The following is a big story - not big in size, big in importance. It is a thoughtful story about the COVID-19 Virus, its effect on people, our human relations and our future. This story could be best depicted as a play.

This is a story about slides examined under a microscope in a laboratory by medical lab technologist MTL professionals. It is a bit frightening. It introduces bad viruses that can infect our bodies, minds and spirits. Parental discretion is advised.

Both technicians are very experienced at microscopic examination, collecting and assessing samples, and running different diagnostic tests. They know how to apply their advanced technical knowledge and skills to run the most recent technologies in their field. They are smart people. They have been in the business a long time. They have seen several viruses. They put creepy things on slides and look at them up close all day long. They know what they are doing.

A microscope slide is a thin flat piece of glass used to hold objects for examination under a microscope. Typically, the "object" is mounted on the slide, and then both are inserted together in the microscope for viewing. This arrangement allows several slide-mounted objects to be quickly inserted and removed from the microscope, labelled, transported, and stored in appropriate slide cases or folders thousands of times a day, all over the world.

This story begins with the first technician admitting to the second technician that the COVID-19 Virus really scares him. Although the majority of people infected by COVID-19 will not require hospitalization and about 80 percent of cases appear to be mild, the virus has a remarkably high rate of severe, and fatal cases compared to the regular flu.

It is believed the virus came to Canada on January 27th, when a man returning to Toronto from Wuhan, China, tested positive. Maybe it came from the United States? It is difficult to know where the first case came from. In 87 days, there were 42,100 confirmed cases and 2,147 deaths in Canada, and it only took 48 days for all Canadian provinces and territories to declare states of emergency.

Tech #1 says; "This COVID-19 Virus is really bad; it scares me, and we don't even know what the solution might be. We haven't seen anything like this before. The entire world is going to have to come together to fight this."

Note: In the play the COVID-19 Virus enters the stage, it is ugly, big in size, bigger than the lab technicians, but it is invisible to them. It does not speak. It sits down on a stool at the end of the lab table. It makes itself comfortable and just listens.

Tech #2 agrees with him but wants to reassure him and says, "We shouldn't worry too much. The world is showing a sense of community like nothing we have seen before. If we are lucky, this pandemic may result in our differences fading away, our similarities becoming clearer, and countries may begin to think less about fighting each other. That would be a very good thing. I prefer to be an optimist. It doesn't matter who finds the solution, what matters is we find it fast. This is a rare moment in time; we are all together. I believe the world will come together and we will beat this virus. We have to."

Tech #1, still very concerned and stressed says, "I have been thinking a lot about this since it first hit the news. We are going to have to conquer this thing as fast as possible, and we are going to have to face a messy aftermath economically. Many people will find themselves out of work because of this, and many businesses will be hurt badly. However, trying to think on the bright side, I do think Canada is resilient. I think people will be willing to cooperate and help each other to survive this. Our strong multicultural society has been working hard, we have been getting along very well for a long time; it has to stay that way!"

Tech #2 agrees with him and says, "Yes, in Canada there is a positive connection between people and the community. There is a bond or 'glue' that binds people together. We care about the overall health of our country and everyone wants others to be okay. In Canada, when people need help, they can get it; there is a will to help each other. We can get through this virus problem; don't worry."

Tech #1 says, "I have been studying this. I think a healthy and resilient society, is a cohesive society, a society that wakes up every morning and asks itself, "Is today a day I ask for help, or a day I offer help?", and then decides to do both every day. Sort of a please help me and let me help you attitude every day. I think that describes Canada fairly-well; at least I hope it does. Every citizen has a right to expect the assistance of society in times of need, if not by government action, through a voluntary organization. That is who we are. It is just one of the things that makes Canada a wonderful place to live."

Tech #2 says, "Yes that is true, the way you described Canada makes me think hope resides in our social cohesion. That is a very positive statement; however, this moment in time is negative. Now, because of COVID-19, every level of government will be on the hottest-of-hot-seats to deliver the economic and social assistance required to take care of people and get them back to work. Let me read to you what is in today's (April 25,2020) Hamilton Spectator newspaper.

Canada's minister of economic development Melanie Joy said, "We stand at a unique juncture in Canadian history. More than ever, our decisions will ensure not just the success of our economy, but our communities. More than ever, the personal is political. More than ever, we must get this right. Canadians can rest assured that government has their backs. Our message to Canadian workers and business is clear: we're here with concrete measures and supports in all regions of our country. We'll be here for you in the weeks and months to come. And we'll get through this together."

That was well said, but at this time a lot is going to be expected from her and many other leaders. They are going to have work a lot of hours on this problem. I hope they don't get burned-out from stress. If they can't take-the-heat, maybe we should replace them with young people; after all, the future of Canada is going to belong to them soon. Canada will come through this, it might look different in some ways, or many ways, but we are strong and together we will be fine!"

Tech #1 says, "I wish I shared your confidence about that. Although I am proud of our multi-cultural society and Canada's world-wide reputation for tolerance and goodwill among all people, we do have problems that I have been thinking about; problems with our human relations that exist as bad viruses. They can get in the way of a smooth recovery, not only here in Canada but in every country.

I have been doing some research and would appreciate if you would take a look at something and give me your opinion. I put together a slide-deck of seven slides that I am very concerned about. Will you put them on your microscope, take a very close look, and tell me what you think?"

Tech #2 says, "Sure I'd be happy to, but you're scaring me. I hope it is not something like the COVID. Where is this slide-deck?"

Tech #1 says, "I will get them. I call the first five slides "The Terrible Five". The sixth slide is the scariest of all; so scary it has its own name. The name I have given this virus is 23 letters, so I abbreviated it to RPDBB-20. The thought of it keeps me up at night. As we know, some viruses have high mutation rates that allow for fast evolution; this could be one of them. It could become very infectious and develop into a virus that could really mess up our future and be a big threat to mankind. I will hold onto Slide 7 until you have looked at the first six. The first five are scary but Slide 6 is terrifying!"

Virus

"The Terrible Five" – Microscope Slide 1

The Racism Virus

I am racism. My racist attitudes and beliefs are born from my misconceptions about people based on perceived racial lines that are often founded on my fear of difference, including differences in customs, values, religion, physical appearance and ways of living and viewing the world. I destroy community cohesion and I create divisions in society. I violate principles of justice. I stand in the way of building respectful, inclusive and safe societies where everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in the economic, social, cultural, recreational and political life of the community.

I continue to be manifested in various ways in society where there is a denial of my contemporary racial oppression. As the diversity in the world continues to grow, people are trying to remedy me, but I try every day to stay strong and grow stronger. I am number one of "The Terrible Five".

Note: In the play, the Racism Virus now enters the stage. Like the COVID-19 Virus, it is also ugly, big in size, bigger than the lab technicians, but it is also invisible to them. It does not speak. It sits down on a stool at the other end of the lab table. It makes itself comfortable and just listens.

Virus

“The Terrible Five” – Microscope Slide 2

The Prejudice Virus

I am prejudice. I am an unjustified or incorrect attitude (usually negative) towards an individual based solely on the individual's membership of a social group. I negatively prejudge another person or group without getting to know their beliefs, thoughts and feelings behind their words and actions. I am grounded in misconception, misunderstanding and inflexible generalizations.

Man is not born prejudiced like me, rather, my prejudice and my way of acting is learned. My prejudice is a hostile attitude. I am a judgment that resists facts and ignores truth and honesty. I am number two of “The Terrible Five”.

Note: In the play, the Prejudice Virus now enters the stage. Like the other two viruses sitting at the table, it is also ugly, big in size, bigger than the lab technicians, but it is also invisible to them. It does not speak. It pulls up a stool at the table which is starting to get crowded.

Virus

“The Terrible Five” – Microscope Slide 3

The Discrimination Virus

I am discrimination. I am the unjust treatment of people, or the treating of someone as inferior based on their race, sex, national origin, age or other characteristics.

I can be either direct or indirect, and can include; harassment, ‘unwanted conduct’, with the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.

I can also include victimization which occurs when someone suffers a ‘detriment’ (a loss, disadvantage, damage or harm such as being left out and ignored or being denied training or a promotion). I am number three of “The Terrible Five”.

Note: In the play, the Discrimination Virus now enters the stage. Like the other three viruses sitting at the table, it is also ugly, big in size, bigger than the lab technicians, and invisible to them. It decides to pull up a stool at the next lab table to have room to be comfortable. It does not speak. It sits, watches and listens.

Virus

“The Terrible Five” – Microscope Slide 4

The Bullying Virus

I am bullying. I am unwanted, aggressive behaviour that is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. I humiliate, intimidate and threaten others. I tease and name-call. I make inappropriate sexual comments. I taunt and spread rumours. I deliberately hurt the reputation of others. I hit, push, steal possessions and I may do sexual assault. I can cause anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, feelings of despair and loneliness. I can destroy the lives of others. I am number four of “The Terrible Five”.

Note: In the play, the Bullying Virus now enters the stage. Like the other four viruses sitting at the tables, it is ugly, big in size, bigger than the lab technicians, and invisible to them. It decides to pull up a stool next to the Discrimination Virus. It does not speak. Like the others, it sits, watches and listens.

Virus

“The Terrible Five” – Microscope Slide 5

The Bigotry Virus

I am bigotry. I am the characteristic of a prejudiced person who is intolerant of opinions, lifestyles, or identities differing from my own. I am stronger than prejudice. I am a more severe mindset of hatred that is often accompanied by discriminatory behaviour.

I am the state of mind of a bigot. I am someone who, as a result of prejudices, treats other people with hatred, contempt, and intolerance based on their ethnicity, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or other characteristics. I am arrogant and mean-spirited. I am number five of “The Terrible Five”.

Note: In the play, the Bigotry Virus now enters the stage. Like the other five viruses sitting at the tables, it is ugly, big in size, bigger than the lab technicians. It decides to pull up a stool at the lab table and sit beside the Bullying Virus. It does not speak. Like the others, it sits, watches and listens.

Tech #2 has now viewed the five slides (“The Terrible Five”), and the conversation between the two techs resumes.

Tech #2 says, “WOW! They are five terrible viruses for sure. I see clearly, from the slide descriptions, we should be doing so much more to address them. If the world can come together so quickly to fight COVID-19, why haven’t we conquered these five terrible viruses that have been with us for such a long, long time?”

Note: If this was a theatrical play within a play, and not just a scary story, this is where the two lab technicians and “The Terrible Five” Viruses would sing a song titled “The Terrible Five”. If you have musical talent, you can write the song and insert it here – give it a try – you may be more creative than you think.

The lab technicians are unaware “The Terrible Five” Viruses are mocking them during the song. The COVID-19 Virus does not join in with this song and decides instead to stroll around the stage while rubbing itself on all nearby surfaces.

Tech #1 says, “Exactly! Why? - that is what I have been wondering about for a very long time. If we don't address them soon, they could mutate into Slide 6. If that happens, the world will have a harder time dealing with the multitude of problems we are sure to be confronted with. Look at Slide 6; it is the scariest slide of all. When you are done, I will share some good news.”

Note: In the play, the Raceprejdisbullybigotism (RPDBB-20) Virus now enters the stage. Like the other six viruses sitting at the tables, it is ugly, big in size, bigger than the lab technicians. It decides to pull up a stool in the middle of the stage. It is the “new” Terrible Virus in Town and it wants to show off. The other six viruses get off their stools, wander over to it, walk around it and stare at it, wondering who this very mean-looking Virus is?

Virus

A Possible New Virus - Microscope Slide 6

The Raceprejdisbullybigotism (RPDBB-20) Virus

Raceprejdisbullybigotism is a portmanteau word, which in linguistics is a blend of words formed by combining or morphing existing words that all relate to a singular concept.

The reason I created this word, in this story/play, was to draw your attention to the words I call “The Terrible Five”. Think about these words and realize how terrible they are. Our society is not addressing these words enough.

It is also a neologism. A neologism is a Greek word that means “new” “speech/utterance”, and is a relatively recent or isolated term, word, or phrase that may be in the process of entering common use.

Raceprejdisbullybigotism 2020 (RPDBB-20) is combining Racism, Prejudice, Discrimination, Bullying and Bigotry into one word describing the potential for a very dangerous disease impacting humankind.

People suffering with raceprejdisbullybigotism will see their daily reality connected to the characteristics of racism, prejudice, discrimination, bullying and bigotry. When they think these thoughts, their views can become infectious. This virus can lead societies to the dark side of moral conviction where “oughts”, “shoulds” and “musts” to accomplish anything positive, can become can'ts, won'ts and will-nots that oppose everything. Thinking in this negative way, and living with these terrible values, can do great harm in our physical world and population.

Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, has said, “We need to make sure we're all working together to change mindsets, to change attitudes, and to fight against bad habits that we have as a society.”

I named Raceprejdisbullybigotism 2020 (RPDBB-20) because it represents the “bad habits” our Prime Minister was talking about. It has the potential to mutate into a very dangerous virus within society. We must keep in mind that mutations can occur silently and spontaneously and can be induced by environmental factors. In the case of RPDBB-20 those environmental factors can be the stresses of economic hardships and the many stresses we are experiencing now and are yet to experience with climate change.

People infected with the RPDBB-20 virus will not wear masks and they will not distance themselves from others to protect others from their views. They think they have power over others. The morphing of “The Terrible Five”, Racism, Prejudice, Discrimination, Bullying and Bigotry, will damage our world in ways beyond our imaginations. They are hindering our ability to live together in peace and harmony, and this can prevent a safe and healthy future.

Tech #2 has finished viewing scary Slide 6 and the conversation between the two techs resumes:

Tech #2 says, "You said Slide 6 was the scariest of all. I can understand why! This RPDBB-20 virus is a dangerous mutation of the viruses you called ""The Terrible Five"". It combines the terrible characteristics of each of them.

If this virus spreads, it could cause a tsunami of hateful ideologies and bias-motivated incidents of aggression everywhere at a time when communities should be working together to get through the COVID-19 crisis. A world-wide spread of RPDBB-20 would target specific communities in many places with discriminatory or racist incidents. A single bias crime can ignite intense and long-standing inter-community tensions and the impact of bias crimes may spread well beyond the target society to general society. This would be TERRIBLE!

Maybe it is a good thing that during the COVID-19 crisis we are forced to reflect on a new way of being, a new way to think and wonder what we will be faced with next. Our emotions are raw from the COVID-19 crisis and we are having to face some pressing answers to questions we never imagined we would be asking.

This would be an especially bad time for a Raceprejudisbullybigotism RPDBB-20 virus to take hold and spread. If it does, people will have to commit to confront it to help end the spread of all forms of hate crimes and bigotry.

The world will have to come together to denounce the hateful speeches that a RPDBB-20 virus would encourage while it spreads misinformation, casts blame, and promotes racism, discrimination or violent action against many communities that deserve to be treated with respect.

Tech #1 says, "You have summed up my concerns exactly. If this RPDBB-20 virus takes hold, it could unravel the solidarity the world is feeling at this moment in the fight to address the COVID-19 crisis. This RPDBB-20 virus is just in my imagination; however, I think it should be in the minds of everyone. At the very least, I think the world should be nervous enough about this proposed 23 letter word to think hard about it. Maybe it could be used as a teaching tool to help people think about ""The Terrible Five"" and why we have to do everything we can to confront them.

It would be a good thing for the world to focus on RPDBB-20 and how it harms our ability to live in harmony. However, everyone would have to be careful not to falsely and unfairly accuse others of being infected and unjustly damage reputations. That would be a symptom that the virus is within ourselves. It is likely everyone will experience moments of ""The Terrible Five"" virus in themselves at times throughout their lives. We all need to be aware of that and we should self-diagnose ourselves sometimes.

To err is human, everyone can have a bad day, but when people become deeply infected by ""The Terrible Five"" (RPDBB-20 virus), when they deeply harm or intend to harm others, that is when the world needs to stand up and stand against them.

The good news is, I think we can beat this. I describe an antidote for RPDBB-20 on Slide 7 – take a look."

Antidote

Fighting the Virus – Microscope Slide 7 The Good News An Antidote to the Raceprejudicebullybigotism RPDBB-20 Virus

Note: The lab technicians return to the microscope to view Slide 7. The RPDBB-20 virus looks on silently; "The Terrible Five" watch also and they all look worried. They listen with a worried look because they know that Slide 7 is a danger to them. The COVID-19 Virus also watches and listens in silence because it realizes if people can attack RPDBB-20 effectively, they can also attack it more effectively and therefore Slide 7 is a danger to them also.

As the lab technicians hover around the microscope ($\geq 2\text{m}$ distance between them), the narrator reads the words on Slide 7:

Where is Superman when we need him? What would Superman fight for in the aftermath of COVID-19? Who on earth can we turn to in the year 2020 to protect our planet?

In these troubled times the closest person we have to Superman is 17-year-old Swedish Environmental Activist, Greta Thunberg. Greta is the world's most prominent climate activist. She has been given great strength by the support of the climate strike movement "Fridays for Future", and many other climate justice movements in other countries.

The youth of our world are the new "Superpeople" for our times. They may not be faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive or able to leap over tall buildings in a single bound like Superman could; however, unlike Superman they are human, and they will be faster than a streak of lightning, more powerful than the pounding surf, and mightier than a roaring hurricane in demanding the fundamental societal change that is required to improve the health of our world.

Fridays For Future says, "We are fighting for our future and our lives because they are directly threatened by the climate crisis and the ecological breakdown. We are taking action against it because we want to protect the beauty of the earth, the diversity of species and the lives of all beings. Our goal is to overcome the climate crisis and to create a society that lives in harmony with its fellow beings and its environment. Join us!"

They also say, "Our movement is independent of commercial interests and political parties and knows no borders. We strike because we care for our planet and for each other. We have hope that humanity can change, avert the worst climate disasters and build a better future. Every day there are more of us and together we are strong. Everyone is welcome. Everyone is needed. No one is too small to make a difference. Join us!"

Before the Climate Action Summit, Greta had 4.5 million followers on Instagram. Now her follower count is over 10 million and it is growing fast. There is no doubt - the youth of our world are now the "Superpeople" for our times.

Greta's influence on the world stage has been described as the "Greta effect". She has received numerous honours and awards including; *Time* Magazine's 100 most influential people, the youngest *Time* Person of the Year, inclusion in the Forbes List of The World's 100 Most Powerful Women (2019), and two consecutive nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize (2019 and 2020). Greta deserves all of these honours and awards - and more.

Greta recently said; "Everyone must fight the climate crisis and the corona virus pandemic simultaneously and not allow the health crisis to delay action on cutting carbon emissions".

I agree. We should all agree!

Speaking at an event in New Zealand in May 2019, the 9th Secretary-General of the United Nations said, his generation was, "not winning the battle against climate change" and that it's up to youth to "rescue the planet".

To "rescue the planet", young people everywhere will need to appeal to the attitudes and understandings that shape public morality with the aim of strengthening them, but they now have the social media network to help them do this. Millions of young people are focused on what must be done.

According to the World Bank, 42% of the world's population was under 25 years old in 2017, and according to Statista as of 2018, there were about 7.6 billion people, and as of mid-2019, about 26 percent, or close to 2 billion of the world's population, were under 15 years old.

With the help of young people, we must not, and we can be sure they will not, let the word "justice" lose its meaning. Its meaning has more to do with "fair play" than with "payback." The real meaning of justice is not found in revenge but in reparation, reconciliation, and restoration. The meanings of words like justice, love, honesty, truth, good, evil, hate, peace and morality are critically important in our world of contemporary tolerance.

People of every age must know that much the same way that love is blind, hatred of raceprejudisbullybigotism is also blind and makes human beings prone to believe things that are simply not true. They know that too many of us fall victim to this offensive, repulsive and socially inappropriate behaviour and way of thinking. They know that they must address the hate within raceprejudisbullybigotism the same way that they must address climate change – together – forever united and never divided.

Looking beyond everyday news of politics and the violence in different parts of the world, young people are taking-in the wider view of how people treat other, and how they should treat others better. In the light of the many lessons, they are learning from the COVID-19 pandemic, they are also learning that there is no better time than now to take this opportunity, to name it – its name is "raceprejudisbullybigotism" – to discuss it more – to condemn it – to denounce it and declare it to be reprehensibly wrong without reservation.

Note: Now the RPDBB-20 Virus and "The Terrible Five" are getting visibly upset. The lab technicians still cannot see them, but the audience can see them. They can see that the viruses are now alarmed, horrified and very frightened by the narrator's words. The viruses realize the control they have enjoyed for so long will become weaker as time passes. They know that they are now facing danger. The viruses are beginning to see they must fear the condemnation of billions of people of every age, but especially young people under the age of 15 who will act. Their actions will impact the future of their world over the next 10 years. All viruses are good at mathematics, they are frightened by the numbers.

Raceprejudisbullybigotism is a recommended new word for this decade. The antidote for it exists in every country; it has for hundreds of years in young people. The difference today is that the world's young people are connected, focused and powerful. In the same way the world has come together to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, the world will now to come together, led by young people, to fight Raceprejudisbullybigotism; a virus that should become known world-wide as "RPDBB-20."

The conversation resumes to end the story:

Tech #2 comments, "I feel better now. Thanks for letting me view the slides. They are a real eye opener. I wish people all over the world could view them and read them to their friends and family. I think the slides (this story) should be posted in every corporation, every workplace - everywhere on this earth. Slide 7 gives me hope."



Tech #1 ends this story by responding as follows:

"I agree, there is very good reason for hope. We can hope because we can rely on the world's youth to bring about required change."

Greta Thunberg said on Jan 29, 2020, "The aim of the Fridays For Future Global Movement is to promote ecological, climatic and social responsibility as well as mental health."

These words make the viruses go into a frenzy on stage with a sudden and overpowering feeling of fear. They panic and head for the exit to get away from the words of the narrator, and the lab technicians, and Greta Thunberg. In the process of trying to escape, they touch the surfaces that are contaminated with the COVID-19 Virus.

As they leave the stage, they all begin to feel feverish. They know their immune systems are not strong. They know they will become weaker and weaker. They know the audience is becoming more powerful than they are, and they know that young people will come after them - faster than a streak of lightning, more powerful than the pounding surf, and mightier than a roaring hurricane - to make them disappear forever. The COVID-19 Virus watches the frenzy.

The COVID-19 Virus has been feeling bad about what it has done to the people of the world. It knew it could spread itself to "The Terrible Five" and "RPDBB-20" because they were not social distancing and they were not wearing gloves and face masks like the lab technicians were. The COVID-19 Virus leaves the stage feeling tired, knowing, that just like the other viruses, it's time will soon come to an end.

Tech #1 continues, "I have no doubt that Greta, with the help of the world's youth, will accomplish that goal and much more. I am confident they can be faster than a streak of lightning, more powerful than the pounding surf and mightier than a roaring hurricane, in demanding the fundamental societal changes that are required. Governments and corporations would be wise to recognize, and accept, their wishes now, to ensure a healthy and productive future for themselves and for society at large.

During this global COVID-19 crisis our common humanity has revealed itself. This is a teachable moment.

With an evolving society, the concrete demands of the common good will also evolve. This means the task of creating a good life for all members of society, in all parts of the world, will never be perfectly realized. With pervasive temptations of individualism and self-interest, and the existence of "The Terrible Five", one of the most pressing demands of the common good is the persistent conversion of hearts in the realization that we do not exist for ourselves. We are all in this - one world - together.

We may soon face challenges bigger than COVID-19. We must prepare now for how our world will be transformed by the intense difficulty, trouble, and danger that the climate crisis will deliver. We must understand that even small increases in temperature will lead to large increases in evaporation, large increases in powerful storms and wildfires, and damage to our food supply. We must understand that even small changes in our human relations and our ability to get along and cooperate with each other - will matter.

The greatest discovery of this teachable moment may be that not only can individual people change their future by merely changing their attitude, so too could the entire world if we come together in solidarity.

In the hope of converting hearts, securing world-wide cooperation, confronting climate change successfully, and defeating "RPDBB-20" everywhere, it would help if people would read these seven slides in their schools, their homes, and pass them along to others."

Tech #2 comments, "I agree, that's a good idea. I feel better. You really thought about this, and you worked hard producing the slides. Is there anything else you can say to give me hope that we will be okay?"

Tech #1 continues, "Well I wrote a poem. Would you like to hear it? For over 40 years, when not working, I have been a World Peace Activist, Environmental Activist, and a Poet."

Tech #2 says, "That explains why you took the time to make the slides. I'm glad you did. I live a busy life and to be honest, I have not been thinking about the need to confront the behaviours of "The Terrible Five". I will try to do a better job at it since working to improve our human relations is important and there are a lot of people being hurt by "The Terrible Five". I would like to hear the poem you wrote."

Tech #1 continues, "The title of the poem is, "Let's Bake a Loaf of Peace".

Let's Bake a Loaf of Peace

There is as much hunger for Peace in this world as there is for bread;
Conflicts starve us all.

There is as much love in the homes of ever country as there is in your own;
Love unites us all.

There is as much need for understanding in this world as there is for forgiveness;
Reconciliation can save us all.

To satisfy the worlds hunger for Peace;
Feed yourself with good judgment,
Feed your governments with good advice,
Feed all others with compassion and hope,
Feed them with opportunities to help them cope.
Let's grow more crops of goodwill and respect,
Let's grow more caring and more sharing,
Let's harvest the will to feed us all,
Let's bake a loaf of Peace.

Robert Hicks

Tech #2 says, "That poem - says it all - beautifully."

End of Act One

Virus Under the Microscope

Act Two

A play-within-a-play for teachers, parents and students
about the COVID -19 virus with the introduction and naming of more viruses.

An educational story (a play) that concludes with hope by Robert Hicks

Act Two was completed on Sunday June 21, 2020, the last day of 3 weeks of activities to celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day in Canada. This is an opportunity to celebrate First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada. This celebration should extend throughout the year.

National Indigenous Peoples Day is 1 of 5 celebrations held across the country to discover and appreciate the wealth and diversity of Canadian society.

Other celebratory days include:

June 24 - Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day

A celebration of Francophone culture with public events including concerts, parades, and firework displays.

June 27 - Canadian Multiculturalism Day

Discovering the significance of multiculturalism in Canada, ensuring all citizens maintain their identities, take pride in their ancestry, and have a sense of belonging. This celebration should also extend throughout the year.

July 1 - Canada Day

The anniversary of Confederation in 1867, when the British North America Act came into effect creating the country of Canada with its initial four provinces of Ontario, Québec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

August 15 - National Acadian Day

A celebration every 5 years to bring Acadian communities together to promote a modern and authentic Acadia. The 6th edition took place in August 2019 in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick where people could immerse themselves in Acadian culture by attending numerous activities.

The play-within-a-play continued ...

A play-within-a-play (or a story-within-a-story), comes from the French saying "mise en abyme" or "placed into abyss" to blur the lines of reality and fantasy like standing between two mirrors and having the weird, self-reflecting feeling because your image seems to keep going forever. Like a frame-within-a-frame, the play is being performed in the confines of another play as the characters of a play are watching a play being performed for them. In this story, the characters are the invisible viruses listening to what the lab techs have to say.

Warning This story ends with hope - but along the way it may sadden readers. Parental discretion is advised.

The two lab techs enter the lab. They had been assigned to different labs and have not seen or talked to each other for 8 weeks. As medical laboratory technologists (MTL) professionals, they have been performing a key role in the management of the current COVID-19 pandemic. They are among the best in the world. They have been labelled as heroes for their efforts. They have been on the front lines, but they have been working behind the scenes where nobody really knows what they do, or that they even exist. In Canada, there are approximately 1.2 million laboratory tests performed every day to help diagnosis and treat the thousands of health issues that affect Canadians. We can be proud of them.

The Viruses also enter the lab. At the end of Act One they ran away because they were frightened by what the lab techs were saying. That was 8 weeks ago and now they have regained their strength and they are feeling fearless again. They form a big circle around the two lab techs and sit down to eavesdrop on their conversation.

Tech #1 says, "The last time we talked was on April 25th, it is nice to see you again. I hope your family is well. My family is doing fine. It saddens me to think back on that date when there were 45,354 confirmed cases of COVID-19, and 2,465 associated deaths in Canada. Today is June 21st and there are 101,002 confirmed cases and more than 8,400 deaths. In the last 8 weeks, 6,000 Canadians have died from the virus."

Tech #2 says, "It is nice to see you also. My family is fine; thanks for asking. I am glad to see you looking healthy and to hear your family is fine. The last time we talked you showed me your 7 virus slides; the racism, prejudice, discrimination, bullying and bigotry viruses. You called them "The Terrible Five". Then you showed me the new RPDBB-20 virus that you referred to as the morphing of "The Terrible Five" into one scary virus. I even remember the long name of that virus; Racepregdisbullybigotism. I have not been able to forget those slides. I have looked at thousands of ugly slides in the last 8 weeks and your slides still haunt me."

Tech #1 says "Sorry about that, I think I warned you at the time the viruses were dangerous. I also showed you the antidote on Microscope Slide 7. I remember that slide gave you hope and made you feel better at the time."

Tech #2 says, "Yes it did, but considering what has happened in the last 8 weeks, I am not feeling good at all! I remember saying if the RPDBB-20 virus spreads, it could cause a tsunami of hateful ideologies and bias-motivated incidents of aggression everywhere at a time when communities should be working together to get through the COVID-19 crisis. A world-wide spread of RPDBB-20 would target specific communities in many places with discriminatory or racist incidents. A single bias crime can ignite intense and long-standing inter-community tensions and the impact of bias crimes may spread well beyond the target society to general society.

That is exactly what happened when George Floyd was brutally murdered by a policeman who was likely infected by the RPDBB-20 virus.

I also remember you said to me the youth of our world are the new "Superpeople" for our times. You said they will be faster than a streak of lightning, more powerful than the pounding surf, and mightier than a roaring hurricane in demanding the fundamental societal change that is required to improve the health of our world. You said we can be sure they will not let the word "justice" lose its meaning. Now, every time I turn on the TV, I see and hear protesters demanding justice."

Tech #1 says, "Yes, I have been seeing the same thing. To be honest with you, I have been very upset also. I share your feelings. What we are seeing is very distressing, to say the least. I am still trying to find reasons for hope, and I think I have found some."

Tech #2 says, "Tell me, I need to hear there is hope."

Tech #1 says, "Well it will take me some time to explain it to you. Do you have time?"

Tech #2 says, "I will give you all the time you need; this is important. Talk to me; I am all ears."

Tech #1 says, "Okay, but before I share the hope, I want to tell you about the research I have done since we last talked. The research is regrettably distressing, but it helps explain the problem. I want to get it off my chest. I made 2 additional virus slides. I would like you to look at them under your microscope."

Tech #2 says, "Okay, show me this research even if I might not like it, but please end your story with hope; I need a reason to stop feeling so heavy hearted."

Tech #1 says, "Okay, you have already seen 6 virus slides and 1 antidote slide; Microscope Slide 7. Microscope Slide 8 is another virus. I call it the Virus of Societal Indifference; look at it."

These words make the viruses sitting in a circle eavesdropping, go into a frenzy of curiosity and excitement. They thought they deserved to be the centre of attention. How can any virus compete with them? Who is this new virus? What has this lab tech discovered? They all run quickly to the microscope to stick their ugly eyes on the lens to take a quick look before Tech #2 gets to it. This is what they see.

Virus

Microscope Slide 8

The Virus of Societal Indifference

I am the Virus of Societal Indifference.

I am a lack of interest, concern, or sympathy. I do not get emotional. I do not care. I never take sides. I look away. I am a state of apathy. I do not feel empathy. I am the absence of feeling. I elicit no response.

I discourage people from speaking out with great outrage and conviction.

Pope Francis issued a powerful and passionate appeal to political rulers and people calling on the nations of the world to overcome me. He called me "a virus that is contagious in our time." He said "I am worse than COVID-19. I paralyze and impede people from doing what is right even when they know that it is right. I am spread by the thought that life is better if it is better for me, and that everything will be fine, if it is fine for me."

I am a hands-off and let nature take its course attitude. I promote a world in which no one feels responsible.

I help leaders make superficial statements and express empty platitudes that are nothing more than sound and fury signifying nothing. I discourage them from going beyond their words.

Some politicians and governments encourage me to promote an apathetic, dissociated and cynical public attitude, so they can rule without having to share power or account for their activities to the public.

When society is infected, political rights can become a hollow concept where civil liberties can be violated at every turn. When people are infected, they think that freedom is a gift that does not have to be worked for. They become easy to manipulate, not because they are gullible, but because they believe in nothing.

When groups have been pushing leaders to address problems for years and nothing happens, and when continual action fades and goals die; I will play a big part.

I am the Virus of Societal Indifference. I distance and desensitize people from the lessons of the past, the ugliness of the present and the possibility of the future.

The 6 viruses are impressed and quickly see the power of this strange virus. They run back to their previous positions in the circle and sit. They are not sure what to say to this new virus; maybe join the club! – an expression used when people have something unpleasant in common. Maybe join us we need your support! They secretly do not like this virus. They are insecure, arrogant and want to prove their superiority. They are jealous and jealousy, at its core, is a by-product of fear, the fear of not being good enough.

The Virus of Societal Indifference enters the stage with arrogance. It is a phantom menace with evil on its mind. It struts around like a villain, showing-off in front of the other viruses. It is big, ugly and invisible to people just like the other viruses. It enters the circle and stands behind Tech #2 silently waiting for Tech #2's reaction.

After a good look, Tech #2 says, "This is terrible and scary. I hope I never get this virus. I hope my friends and family never get this virus. I hope the people that lead my community can successfully guard themselves against this virus. I have never seen such an unpleasant and unsettling definition of a virus. You were right when you said that I would not want to hear about it, but now I have to think about it, absorb it. Will the other virus you wanted me to look at be as bad as this one? I hope it is not worse than this; I want to be able to sleep tonight! I am counting on you to give me a reason to cheer-up after looking at these slides."

Tech #1 says, "I hope I don't let you down. It is easy to be negative; it takes effort to be positive. We must remember not to over-focus on the negatives and under-focus on the positives in our lives. I will do my best to cheer you up. You know I care about you and we will be able to talk through this. Look at Microscope Slide 9. I am sorry it is also scary. We must be brave to fight these viruses. We can be strong together."

With these words, the 7 eavesdropping viruses return to a frenzy of curiosity and excitement. What has this Lab Tech come up with this time? Who is this new virus? This Lab Tech must be a Virus Detective. They run quickly to the microscope to stick their ugly eyes on the lens and take a quick look before Tech #2 gets to it. This is what they see.

Virus

Microscope Slide 9

The Police Brutality Virus

I am the Police Brutality Virus. Some people call the people I infect, "bad apples". To say that I only infect a few bad apples is a naive and careless dismissal of me. The world needs to wake up to the fact that I am very infectious, and over time, I can produce large batches of bad apples.

I have a mean and infectious attitude. I encourage the police officers I infect to act as their own "use-of-force expert". I help them to engage members of the public in psychological warfare with an authoritative and commanding manner. I make people feel both humiliated and terrified, and as a result, they fear for their physical safety.

When police officers are infected, they become violence prone. I target the following police officers:

- Police officers that have pervasive and enduring personality traits that are manifested in antisocial, narcissistic, paranoid, or abusive tendencies. These tendencies are intensified by police work and interfere with their judgment and interactions with others, particularly when they perceive challenges or threats to their authority. I teach them to lack empathy for others and to not accept responsibility for their behaviour.

- Police officers that have had traumatic job-related experiences such as justifiable police shootings that have taken a toll on them. They may not be egocentric or violent by nature, but I infect their emotional baggage. It is always with them. It has accumulated from previous violent incidents. It puts them on the verge of burn-out. It can cause them to lose control. I teach them to conceal it from others.
- Police officers that are easily frustrated and seen as badge-happy, macho cops that are generally immature, impressionable and impulsive. Those who brought positive attributes to their work but had them deteriorate early in their careers due to a full range of negative patrol encounters. Officers that have been strongly influenced by a police culture that has not shown them how to maintain a professional demeanour while dealing with citizens.
- Police officers who develop a dominant, heavy-handed policing style, and who are particularly sensitive to challenge and provocation. Officers who use force to show they are in charge. Their heavy-handed behaviour becomes their norm, and the longer this pattern continues, the more difficult it is to change. Officers who become invested in police power and control, who see little reason to change. Officers who perceive that the organization sanctions their behaviour.
- Police officers with serious personal problems, such as separation, divorce, or other problems that destabilize their job performance. Officers with a tenuous sense of self-worth and a high level of anxiety that they mask well. Officers who generally function reasonably until the stress of their personal situation undermines their confidence and makes it increasingly difficult to deal with fear, animosity, and emotionally charged patrol situations. Officers who exhibit erratic patrol behaviour that signals the possibility that they will lose control.

I am the Police Brutality Virus. Not every officer is infected by me, and although most are not, all are at risk of becoming infected. How well the risk is monitored, matters. I know that police officers provide an invaluable service. I know that because of me some people paint all of them with one brush. I know that is ridiculous and unkind to those who serve to protect and to make a difference. But, the world must wake up to the fact that I exist and that I am very infectious and very capable of producing large batches of bad apples. Meaningful police reform is necessary to address me. You cannot stop me; you can only hope to contain me.

The 7 viruses look at each other wondering what they have done. They know they are responsible for this brutality, but believe they have the virus of Societal Indifference to fall back on. It makes it possible for them not to care. They don't care about bad apples or the reputation of the police. In fact, they are all mean-spirited and they support bad apples. They run back to their previous positions in the circle and sit.

They are not sure what to say to this new virus; maybe join the club! - an expression used when people have something unpleasant in common. Maybe join us we need your support! They secretly do not like this virus. They are insecure, arrogant and want to prove their superiority. They are jealous and jealousy, at its core, is a by-product of fear, the fear of not being good enough.

The Police Brutality Virus enters the stage with arrogance. It is another phantom menace. It struts around like it is saying, "look at me; look at how powerful I am." It is big, ugly and invisible to people just like the other viruses. It enters the circle. All viruses listen closely to what the lab tech will say next.

Tech #2 says, "This slide helps explain why we are seeing so many sickening examples of police brutality on television. It also explains why "Black Lives Matter", and why their supporters of every age, race and ethnicity, are protesting in the streets with extreme passion, conviction and determination. This is a detailed description of a deep-rooted, longstanding, chronic and recurring problem. Associated protests are happening across the globe. I don't believe they will end soon. Millions of protesters are expressing rage. The protest will continue until meaningful and significant police reform takes place to address this. I hope with all my heart that the protests are peaceful."

All viruses look at each other while thinking about how the protests are not good for them. To hear that the protests may continue for some time disturbs them. They know that millions of passionate people believers of goodwill, compassion, respect and justice for all, are a huge threat to them.

Tech #1 says, "I think you have described this well to call this virus a deep-rooted, longstanding, chronic and recurring problem. I agree that protests will not likely end soon. This time, people around the world will not be silent; they are responding; they are intervening. I think the "world" has learned from the past. I think society is changing. I think the protests show a great level of concern. I think we have learned from experience and have become sensitive to the plight of victims.

Thinking about what the future likely holds helps us determine which road to take. Thinking about the future shapes our decisions. I think millions of people are thinking about the future more, and our collective wisdom is identifying what must change and the need to change now.

During my research I discovered information from April 2018, that I am very surprised has not be highlighted in the news recently. Canada is far from immune from instances of excessive use of force by police, including those involving racialized citizens. In fact, many cities have had a long history of deaths, incidents and investigations involving police that have reignited anti-black racism concerns.

According to a report by CBC News published on April 5, 2018, between 2000 and 2017, 699 police officers were involved in fatal interactions with the public. Canada's national police force, the RCMP, was responsible for the most (176), followed by municipal forces in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. Most officers faced no charges. 49 incidents are still under investigation, and only 11 resulted in the laying of manslaughter charges according to data provided by the CBC in the report.

Between 2000 and 2017, police were involved in at least 461 fatal interactions with civilians across Canada. As part of its investigative series titled: Deadly Force, the CBC assembled the first comprehensive analysis of these interactions and shared the data. You can read the report on the internet. According to the CBC, during the 17-year period in question there was an average of 25 fatal police interactions per year and 70 per cent of victims suffer from mental health and substance abuse problems.

I would like to note here that; Canada's largest mental health hospital, the Toronto based Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, has recently said officers should not respond to incidents involving people in crisis. Dozens of doctors are now calling policing a public health crisis, urging for the reallocation of police money to other community programs.

The CBC report goes on to say of the 461 cases involving a fatal police encounter, the CBC could only identify 18 cases where criminal charges were laid against an officer, only three murder charges were laid, and all were second-degree. Of these cases, there have been two convictions. Some of the cases are still before the courts.

Until this point, no such centralized repository of statistics existed. This vacuum of information is, in and of itself, a problem that engenders a lack of accountability in Canadian policing. Police authorities in Canada have the capacity to collect and release this critical data to the public on an ongoing basis, but it appears they choose not to.

The report said that Statistics Canada estimates that police have about one million encounters every year with people who have a mental or substance use disorder. Experts say that number is getting higher.

The report also said that, "Overall, the Caucasians represent nearly half the victims in the database, which is not surprising given that this is the largest racial group in the country." However, when considering the racial and ethnic composition of the overall population, two distinct groups are overwhelmingly over-represented in these encounters: Black and Indigenous people.

Most victims — 71 per cent — were killed by police following a gunshot. In non-gunshot deaths, a taser was found to have been deployed in nearly 28 per cent of cases.

They said that while the deadly use of force by police can have a significant impact on the relationship between law enforcement and the communities they oversee, no official body in Canada collects or tracks the details of these incidents. All that exists currently is a patchwork of statistics across provinces or groups of private citizens who are trying to keep tabs on the number of victims.

But the numbers are the background noise, the radio static behind the gunshots. While police are kept hopping with calls involving mental illness, the tragedies often have little to do with lack of social support and much more to do with decades of North American police training that taught officers to go in fast and big. As you can imagine, going in fast and big while being infected by the Police Brutality Virus is a recipe for disaster.

It concerns me that this information is not widely known. It also concerns me that similar statistics for the United States are not available. If the CBC could gather this information in Canada, surely it would be easy to gather the same information in the United States. Recent protests have been demanding this information and it should be readily available.

Tech #2 says, "Wow! How did you find this report? I agree it should be available and easy to access. It should be updated and communicated every year. We should not have to rely on the CBC to do it. The RCMP and police forces across the country should be reporting this information regularly to be open and transparent about the work they do."

Tech #1 says, "I did not know it existed; I found it by accident with a Google search. Oh! - there is something else I would like to get it off my chest."

Tech #2 says, "I'm listening."

Tech #1 says, "It is the issue of Systemic Racism. Canada and the United States have a long and unfortunate history of systemic racism. It concerns me that many people don't try to learn about this, and many are in denial about it. I am sure the reason in many cases, is related to the virus of Societal Indifference that you just saw under the microscope. When I hear people in leadership positions and in the news seem so dense and uninformed about the subject, it frustrates me. It is more than disturbing that RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki denied that systemic racism exists in the national police force, only to reverse that position within days after her comment was highlighted in the news.

Systemic racism is the way disadvantage, discrimination and exclusion are embedded in social systems over time. It differs from overt discrimination in that no individual intent is necessary. It refers to the exclusion or under-representation of people of colour and Indigenous people in society through the policies, attitudes and decisions of those in power that lead to inequalities and disparities between races.

It is embedded in many workplaces, schools, hospitals, law enforcement and criminal justice systems in ways that many of us may not notice. I do not see it as a virus like the others, but it is given birth by the others. It can take root and become established as people become infected by "The Terrible Five" viruses, and the virus of Societal Indifference. Pope Francis warned the world about it. In systemic racism, indifference reigns more than people realize.

Individuals can be anti-racist within systems and institutions that are systemically racist, but believe they are not equipped to affect the change required to fight the injustice they observe.

A racist bureaucrat can make it a policy or strategy of deliberately taking no action concerning an issue, challenging situation, or other problem, in the belief that this course will ultimately result in the best outcome possible. A non-racist bureaucrat infected with the Virus of Societal Indifference can do the same thing. People must be honest about this. Society must address it. This is another reason for the protests all over the world."

Tech #2 says, "Wow! You have really thought this through. Is there anything else you feel you need to get off your chest?"

Tech #1 says, "Well, yes, as a matter of fact there is, if you don't mind listening to my rantings a bit longer?"

Tech #2 says, "Please proceed, I am finding what you are saying informative and interesting!"

Tech #1 says, "It is on the subject of the virus of Societal Indifference. There is one example of it that infuriates me so much I get angry when I think about it."

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Tech #2 says, "Tell me about it."

Tech #1 says, "What I want to mention is what was printed in the news at the end of October 2019 about a legal case. It's rare for a current or former leader of one of the world's largest energy firms to testify under oath about climate change, but that is what happened. Appearing as an Exxon witness, Rex Tillerson, the ex-Exxon Mobile Corp. Chief Executive Officer (and former leader of one of the world's largest energy producers for 11 years), said the following:

"It may be emissions are so de minimus that they're inconsequential, or you may be in a business environment where the government is just not likely to do anything." - "You know, if your in a third-world developing country."

He was inferring that CO2 emissions may be so inconsequential that they can be called de minimus which is a Latin expression meaning "about minimal things"; a legal doctrine by which a court refuses to consider trifling matters; the law does not concern itself with trifles.

He was saying in effect that the future health of our planet may be considered by him, or others, as a trifling matter. He was one of the many who have been working hard to persuade the public and political elites that "business as usual" must continue, and that a timely shift away from dependence on fossil fuels is unfeasible or unnecessary.

He also said on the witness stand the following:

"We knew, it was a real issue. We knew it was a serious issue and we knew it was one that's not something that was just suddenly going to disappear off our concern list because it is going to be with us for certainly well beyond my life-time."

The company knew for a long time the impact of fossil fuels on the world. He was admitting that he knew, and the oil industry knew, that in this time of climate crisis, transitioning away from fossil fuels in a rapid, democratic and socially just manner was then, and is today, required, but they chose to look away.

Social responsibility is an ethical framework and suggests that every individual and corporation has an obligation to act for the benefit of society at large, and a duty to perform to maintain a balance between the economy and the world's ecosystems. Having something on a concern list and not acting on it ignores this responsibility. This was an admission they were being indifferent to the needs of the environment and not taking the steps necessary to adequately address the climate crisis with the urgency it requires.

When he resigned from his position in 2016 to become US President Donald Trump's Secretary of State, he could have informed the President about what he knew to discourage the withdrawing of the United States from the Paris Agreement. Yet on June 1, 2017, President Trump announced that the US would cease all participation in the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change mitigation. Either Rex Tillerson thought the emissions of CO2 were too "trifling", or President Trump also thought the subject was "de minimus". It appears that both think this.

Most people in the world do not think emissions of CO2 is a trifling matter. According to the World Economic Forum, 42% of the world population is under 25 years old. I am sure that 42% would not agree that concerns about climate change are a trifling matter, and neither would most of the remaining 58% that are over the age of 25. This is just one of the many reasons why Greta Thunberg and her "Friday's For Future" movement have been protesting, and likely will continue for a long time. They are just getting started!"

Tech #2 says, "You made your point. The world's energy strategy is too industry-friendly and very unfriendly to the earth's future. That energy strategy has a hands-off and let nature take its course attitude. It is clearly infected with the Virus of Societal Indifference.

Your descriptions of the 8 viruses makes it clear that the world must come together to fight for both social justice and environmental justice. That is what the protests around the world are doing now. The protests are demonstrating the world is taking notice and change is coming, whether governments, business or industry like it. Protesters are shouting they will no longer accept "indifference" in their world."

All viruses have been listening and they do not like what they hear. They know if the world is no longer going to embrace them, there is major threat to them. Continual protests around the world will definitely not be good for them. It is beginning to appear certain that millions of passionate people, believers of goodwill, compassion, respect and justice for all, are going to be at war with them. The thought of this makes them want to run and hide, but they want to keep listening to what these lab techs will say next. They remain seated in silence.

Tech #1 says, "That is exactly what I am thinking! I expect the protests will increase significantly. The "Black Lives Matter" movement, the "Friday's For Future" movement, and many other similar movements, are going to come together. Likely many universities and colleges will join the movement. The protests could get massive and extend years. I hope they stay peaceful."

Tech #2 says, "I think you are right about that. The status quo must change. Everyone wants our world to be stable and secure for everyone. Everyone is demanding social and environmental justice now. All methods to achieve this goal must be peaceful."

Tech #1 says, Yes! The status quo must change. The existing state-of-affairs is not providing the social justice or environmental justice that people are demanding. The protests are saying, 'there is nothing left to say and there is everything left to do'. The protesters believe the sun has never shined on a cause of greater worth.

Am I optimistic about the future? Absolutely! There are people devoting their ideas, resources, and even their lives to solving every challenge the world faces. Optimism can be a powerful call to action. Optimism has a multiplier effect; the more optimists and protesters there are working for a better future, the more reasons there are to be optimistic."

Tech #2 says, "Interesting! I am starting to feel better. When we began this conversation, I asked you end your story with some hope; I need a reason to stop feeling so heavy hearted. The last time we talked, you shared an amazing poem, "[Let's Bake a Loaf of Peace](#)". Have you written any new poems? "

Tech #1 says, "Yes! I composed a short poem, titled "[Like the Bombs](#)". Would you like to hear it?"

Tech #2 says, "Yes please!"

Like the Bombs

A little boy tries to wipe tears from his eyes
But they keep falling like the bombs
A little girl cries because her brother dies
And her heart keeps pounding like the bombs
Why-oh-why must the children cry
Why must their tears keep falling like the bombs
Bombs of metal explode - bombs of injustice erode
We must never forget, we must never forget
War is hell, we must never forget
We must never forget, we must never forget
Injustice is hell, we must never forget.

Tech #2 says, "That is a great poem! I have never thought of injustice that way. It makes a very strong point; a very sad point. I am looking for reasons to feel uplifted. Do you have anything else to share to help me feel better about the mess the world is in now? I need to feel hope that solutions are near."

Tech #1 says, "Weeks ago you said, in Canada, when people need help, they can get it; there is a will to help each other. And I said a healthy, resilient and cohesive society, is a society that wakes up every morning and asks itself – is today a day I ask for help – or a day I offer help – and then decides, every day, to do both. I believe in those words! I believe there is truth in them, and I think that is what is happening. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought people together like no other time in history. By nature, people will seek the help of others and form a community that is geared toward survival and best interests of everyone. That is what the protesters are coming together to do.



I thought of an idea that might provide a considerable amount of hope; it is an idea that could crush the viruses we have been talking about."

Hearing this, all viruses jump to their feet and panic. They had been sitting relaxed listening to the lab techs talk, but suddenly are frightened, truly frightened by the words of Tech #1. They want to run but know they must stay to listen to what he would say next. They were nervous but stood still, silently listening.

Tech #2 says, "You think the viruses are crushable? You clearly have the heart of an optimist. I would like to have some of that optimism. Where does it come from?"

Tech #1 says, "Well, the way I see it, to keep it simple, I respectfully suggest there are 4 words in the English language that we need to focus on. They can work for us. The 4 words are; goodwill, compassion, respect and justice. Consider the following:

Goodwill among people is important in every area of your life. It is an emotion that exists within us. Spreading goodwill makes people feel good about you, and it encourages them to spread goodwill to others.

Compassion gives us the ability to understand someone else's situation and the desire to take action to improve their lives. For people who are dependent on others for help and support, compassion is often the most important factor in allowing them to lead fulfilling lives.

Respect from others is important because it helps us feel safe and express ourselves. Respect in our relationships builds feelings of trust, safety, wellbeing, and creates a fair environment. The highest form of respect towards another is acceptance of who they are. Acceptance without judgment. Acceptance without ridicule. Acceptance of their beliefs.

Justice is important because it makes life possible in our complex, civilized society. It is important to provide fair treatment to every individual without exception regarding their personal rights. Social justice is important for the welfare of society. Environmental justice is the movement that links environmental degradation with social justice in a fight for sustainable human rights and a sustainable world.

Think about how Racism, Prejudice, Discrimination, Bullying and Bigotry “The Terrible Five” known as RPDBB-20, plus Societal Indifference, would be affected if they were confronted every day of every year for many years by millions of expressions of goodwill, compassion, respect and justice. They would be crushed.

Consider that people can use a simple greeting gesture to represent the 4 words (goodwill, compassion, respect, justice), to put the 4 words into the minds of people every time they see each other.

That simple greeting gesture could be 4 fingers held horizontally over the heart for a few seconds. This would be better than a handshake or hug, especially at this time of social distancing. It would say; I wish you goodwill, I feel compassion for you, I respect you, and I wish justice for you.

A hand over the heart is associated with honesty. Adding the words goodwill, compassion, respect and justice would multiply heartfelt significance. If people want to add emphasis to the greeting, they could tap their heart 4 times with 4 fingers. This symbol could also become an emoji to add to the end of millions of emails exchanged every day.

I Tap For You

I wish you goodwill throughout your life
I wish you compassion without any strife
I wish you respect, every minute, every day
I wish you justice, life is meant to be this way



The 4 words could be used as a formula to destroy “The Terrible Five” viruses, and the virus of Societal Indifference. Tapping 4 fingers over your heart is fast, easy, and it would speak volumes at this time in history when we all need to wish each other well.”

Hearing this, all viruses are stricken with great fear. They start to run. They run in all directions, looking for the exit. While running, they hear and feel the bombs of goodwill, compassion, respect and justice exploding around them.

Tech #2 says, “I feel much better now. Starting today, whenever I meet you, or leave the pleasure of your company, I will tap my heart with 4 fingers, 4 times, to wish you goodwill, compassion, respect and justice.”

Hearing this, the viruses know they cannot escape. They know their time is running out. They feel trapped. At this moment, they are reminded of George Floyd. They want to breathe and realize everyone deserves to breathe.

End of Act 2

Act 3 of this play-within-a-play will follow in the real world; followed by more acts. I encourage you to write and perform your own acts. The 2 Lab Techs will be happy to help you. Speak with them while you write. Borrow their microscope and look closer at the world you live in.

Talk to people. Do something. Do not be indifferent.

This story was written for the COVID-19 Archive at the Brock University Library to serve as a historical record of time during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020
by Robert Hicks - Canadian Peace Activist, Climate Activist, and Poet.

(“I Tap For You” poem created by Robert’s youngest sister Carol Fentiman)