

HOLOCAUST & HUMAN RIGHTS
ART & WRITING CONTEST
HIGH SCHOOL ESSAY
FIRST PLACE

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Essay Contest- Annual Essay Contest in Commemoration of Yom HaShoah

Question 1:

“At annual Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremonies a resounding message is “Never Again.” What does “Never Again” mean to you? What responsibilities do you have as an “upstander” to ensure this phrase becomes a reality?”

“6 million Jews were killed,” the teacher read, as the dull white slides moved quickly across the smartboard. Students, uninterested, sat hunched in their seats, eyes glazed, indifferent to the sound of 6 million people dying. Perhaps because they had previously heard the same statistic in their third and fourth period classes.

Living in a predominantly Jewish community, you would expect more students to be devastated to learn about the Holocaust, but it seemed the majority were uninterested. Why? Over time, a statistic becomes a number, and a number fails to remember each and every person who was stripped from their families, abused, and brutally murdered. There is no weight to a number, but a personal story can connect a reader to a cause.

In tenth grade, I had the incredible chance to read and examine Elie Wiesel's *Night* in my English class. The tiny blue book given to me as a homework assignment soon became one of the most impactful and eye-opening narratives I had ever read. The story follows Wiesel as he struggles to survive the Holocaust while being forced to choose between his life and his faith in God. Readers can feel Wiesel's anguish during these moments thanks to his personal narrative;

the impact of a personal anecdote allowed me to understand on the severity of the situation and reflect my own privilege having security and right to free expression.

We can hear about the slaughter of millions of people, but experiencing it is incomprehensibly painful. Seeing people get shot and fall to the floor, hanged in front of hundreds of people, and abused and beaten on the streets may seem fictitious, but Wiesel does not leave out any detail that has remained ingrained in his mind.

The events Wiesel expresses, echo the voices and struggles of the millions of lives that were lost during the Holocaust. The one experience of Wiesel leads to mind to imagine the terrors that millions of other Jews had to face. Although we can leave a 55-minute class and forget about what we learned about World War II, the survivors and the victims never had that option to “just forget.”

As a result, it begs the question, why should an event like the Holocaust worry someone who was not involved? Because it's not just about remembering a day and memorizing facts for an upcoming "World War II test," it's about never forgetting the day that shattered the world. It's about never forgetting the relatives, children, and lives lost as a result of a “opposing” religion. It's about never forgetting that people were thrown into camps, starved, assaulted, and left to die on the streets.

Later that day, after school, I brought up the subject with some friends. To my surprise, it seemed that the majority of my friends had little understanding of what had occurred during

World War II. It may have been due to a lack of attention on the subject in their own classrooms, or it could have been because they had simply blocked the information that they had crammed the day before their World War II exam. Nonetheless, it appeared that no matter what school a student attended, there was no influence or genuine empathetic understanding of the horrors of the Holocaust. And as time passes, these numbers and events begin to fade from memory, which can be dangerous.

In fact, according to a survey conducted by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (CJMCAG), a startling two-thirds of American millennials had no idea what Auschwitz or the Holocaust were. 66 percent of the 1,350 millennials polled had never heard of Auschwitz—the Nazis' biggest concentration camp constructed to carry out their Jewish extermination plan. A catastrophic incident that occurred less than 100 years ago appears to be fading the minds of younger and future generations.

Furthermore, recent events at the capitol building serve as obvious warning signs that action must be taken sooner rather than later. Amidst the chaos, a particular man caught the attention of several news outlets and individuals. On the day of the riot, Robert Keith Packer, a local, wore a sweater labeled "Camp Auschwitz," with a skull on the bottom to represent the death of millions of innocent Jews. We have not progressed as a country as long as people are comfortable rejoicing and displaying such heinous propaganda that glorifies the killing of millions of people. People wearing shirts that praised "Auschwitz" screams the ignorance and complete oblivion of our society that has lasted for years. While we advocate for change, there is

still injustice and suffering begging for our attention: victims of starvation, discrimination, and political persecution.

“Never again,” preaches the recognition and remembrance of lost lives. It’s not a day to revisit the sorrows of the past, but rather move forward to discourage tragedies from reoccurring. Our world appears to be in perpetual conflict and on the brink of total chaos; now more than ever it is our responsibility to accept events like the Holocaust so that they never happen again.

As time passes and Holocaust survivors pass away, it is critical that we share their stories and ensure that an event as horrific as the Holocaust never arises again. While we have the time and security now, we must act by constantly bringing up conversations about what happened rather than avoiding “difficult” topics. As an upstander, to avoid history from repeating itself, our generation and future generations must comprehend the atrocities of the past and share our new understandings with friends and family. We must no longer remain silent and must use our voices to express the fears of millions who did not have a voice in the Holocaust. As Elie Wiesel once said in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, “Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

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HIGH SCHOOL ESSAY
SECOND PLACE

NETRA EASWARAN

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Grade: 10

Plumes of ash submerge the sky in hues of slate and ebony. Tears cascade down mud-streaked cheeks, wiped away with calloused fingers. Fear festers amongst lost souls. The vibrations of a whip sear the silence. Pangs of hunger devastate skeletal bodies as the stench of decay permeates the air. The austere camp beckons death with open arms.

The events of the Holocaust were so appalling in nature that they merited a term of their own: genocide. Coined by Polish-born lawyer Raphael Lemkin, the phrase combines the ancient Greek word ‘genos’ meaning race or tribe, and the Latin ‘cide’ which translates to the action of killing, thereby elucidating upon the destruction of a particular ethnic group. The international community has since condemned the horror and brutality that took place during the Holocaust, nevertheless, it is frightening to consider the many parallels one can draw to our contemporary state of affairs. For society is yet to elude the confines of prejudice, discrimination, and injustice. Minorities across the world remain silenced; forced to imbibe majority culture and disregard the richness of their heritage. And as toxic political rhetorics continue to emerge, engulfing communities with their malice and hostility, we bear witness to both religious and racial persecution. With reports surfacing of the forced indoctrination of the Uyghur Muslims in China, the ‘ethnic cleansing’ of the Rohingya in Myanmar, and the targeted murders of the Nuer in South Sudan, it is evident that genocide is no longer a term of the past. It shrouds our present.

When confronted with such atrocities, it is our responsibility as a human race, that takes precedence. And although the promise of ‘never again’ still rings true today, we must contemplate whether these two words alone are capable of halting a mass extermination in its tracks. Intervention and mitigation are idealistic in nature, suggesting that the strength of humanity shall bring about justice. However, a more proactive response to such moral transgressions must be characterized by the following: awareness, solidarity, and accountability.

The obsidian shadow of the Holocaust pervaded due to ignorance and delusion. It was unfathomable that one man alone could institute such barbarity, and as such, the Jews of Germany and its neighboring countries remained inattentive to their surroundings. Eager to clench onto the illusion that they would be spared from the grisly tales that disseminated across villages and towns. Holocaust survivor Eliezer Wiesel recalls in his memoir *Night*, the evasiveness and complacency exercised by fellow Jews in Sighet. The province was ensconced in the mountains of Transylvania, isolated from the Anti-Semitism that erupted throughout Germany. Wiesel narrates, “Yes we even doubted [Hitler’s] resolve to exterminate us. The Germans were already in our town, the Fascists were already in power, the verdict was already out- and the Jews of Sighet were smiling” (pages 8-10).

The international community was heedless to Hitler’s schemes as well, unwilling to comprehend the certainty of immediate Jewish persecution, while the Nazi Party spared no expense in cloaking their myriad of misdeeds, destroying any conceivable evidence. The truth had been buried. This alarming pattern is present among today’s cases of ‘ethnic cleansing’ as world leaders absolve themselves of responsibility, deny all accusations, and impede external investigations. Yet our ability to address these crises and provide humanitarian aid is contingent upon our knowledge of the situation. Injustice can be defeated only by truth, for information holds power. Universal reform and dialogue can be engaged strictly after complete transparency is ensured. It is our utmost duty to shed light upon any information we are acquainted with so that we can strive to ameliorate the underlying causes of such prejudice and respond to these grievances with preparedness and haste.

With regards to solidarity and accountability, the two are interwoven facets, for the former stimulates the latter. To invoke an old adage, 'there is strength in numbers.' By presenting a united front, we actively denounce these acts of intolerance. A single voice is easily drowned out amongst the commotion, yet when thousands of voices speak in unison, they are heard. As Wiesel reflects, "We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented" (page 118). It is often minority and disenfranchised communities that are the victims of discriminatory violence. Yet their plight is overshadowed by majority groups who are endowed with societal authority and the ability to advocate for themselves. The Holocaust attests to the notion that malicious intent cannot be dissuaded with ease. Yet a single spark is all that is needed to light a fire of resistance. Those responsible for condoning or bolstering acts of injustice can no longer be permitted to escape unscathed. For an absence of repercussion denotes forgiveness. As Wiesel notes, "...One person of integrity can make a difference, a difference of life and death. As long as one dissident is in prison, our freedom will not be true. As long as one child is hungry, our life will be filled with anguish and shame" (page 120).

The silhouette of the Holocaust shall remain cast upon our history, whilst its evils echo with potency. And although we may feel inclined to cower in shame and reproach, consigning our past to oblivion, however flawed, is perhaps the greatest crime we could commit against those who are no longer alive to tell their stories. We must bear witness. We must remember. Our past is interwoven with our present, yet every tapestry is entitled to a new beginning. "For in the end, it is all about memory, its sources and its magnitude, and, of course, its consequences" (epilogue, *Night*).

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HIGH SCHOOL ESSAY

THIRD PLACE

MAX GROSS

Max Gross

“Never shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under the silent sky” is a phrase no one should ever say(34). But, it is not until you hear or read a story of a Holocaust survivor, that we truly understand what this means. Every second, people were burned into ashes: children, men, and women. In the time it takes to read this essay hundreds, if not thousands of people, were being burned alive. Once you have one of these experiences, you are compelled to share what you learned with others to ensure they too learn about the Holocaust. Millions of Jews were killed. The only way to ensure this travesty does not repeat itself, we must share our experiences with others.

The Holocaust seemed unreal to many. It makes sense; who would think that a person would want to exterminate an entire population. People were naive and followed others because nobody knew better. Now, we know better. We know how to prevent similar events from occurring in the future. When the Holocaust took place, the Germans did not come and take everyone at one time. They took people in stages. In Night, in the town of Sighet, the foreign Jews who were taken first. When one of the Foreign Jews escaped after being taken, Moishe the Beadle returned to his village to tell his story. The only problem was “Some even insinuated that he only wanted their pity, that he was imagining things”(7). Why should they believe such atrocities? They were productive members of their community. This fate would certainly not befall them. However, as more people were taken, it became too late to act. There was no longer a place to flee or people to seek help from. The Germans took a small amount of people that were easily managed. Once the Germans had control, they threatened to kill anyone if they retaliated. Through force and fear, there was nothing the Jews could do. It was too late. By

sharing the atrocities of the Holocaust, we are educating people that yes, this can happen, and next time, it might be you. We want to prevent such hatred from spreading to the point of annihilating a group. We want to shed light on this horror to teach tolerance and acceptance. The lives lost during this dark period in history wiped out future generations. The survivors lost whole families, suffered from survivor's guilt, and the world lost innovations in science, art, and technology.

Humans are born humans for a reason. They are not animals. Throughout the Holocaust the Germans dehumanized Jews. Not only were they slaughtered in the thousands every day but before their death they "Went to work as usual and loaded the heavy stones onto the freight cars"(73). The Jews would be forced to work long hours with no food or water. If they were tired they were beaten or shot. The conditions the Germans created for the Jews are not only inhumane but should never be replicated again. Since we have all seen pictures and heard first hand accounts of this event we must tell others to ensure these events "Never Again" happen.

As of now, about eighty years after the Holocaust, events like the Holocaust continue to happen. If we search China on the news, we will come across the Uighur Muslims who are being held captive. This could be considered a "Modern Holocaust." Similar to the Jews' religious buildings getting burned or bombed, the Muslims are not allowed to grow beards, which is one of their religious symbols. They too are slowly taken into detention centers because they are considered a threat to security due to their religion. After the Holocaust occurred, we hoped after "The SS had fallen and the resistance had taken charge of the camp" this would be the last time people would need to be freed from imprisonment for their religious beliefs(115). Clearly, this is not the case. Just like the Jews, it is too late to save the Uighur Muslims. World leaders need to put human rights on their agenda and talk to countries who are not upholding these rights. The

world has known for years about China's treatment of the Uighur Muslims, but influential world leaders have taken no action. Former President Trump reportedly gave permission to build the concentration camps because he was in the middle of a trade deal with President Xi Jinping. It is not morally right to put business over the freedom and rights of humans. Unfortunately, citizens can only influence others to an extent. If there is no military behind the protests, no change can occur. As citizens, we can discuss these events with the people around us so that we can make change on a small scale. We hope that the more we discuss the events of the Holocaust, dehumanization, and acceptance these events will "Never Again" happen in the future.

The genocides that continue to occur today need to be stopped. The Nazi officers instilled tremendous fear into the camp prisoners. When someone stepped out of line, a punishment rapidly followed. "There. I was face-to-face with the Angel of Death . . . No. Two steps from the pit, we were ordered to turn left and herded into barracks"(34). Weisel was so close to "the pit," death was in sight. The quote illustrates the strict rule that the Jews, the victims, were under in the Holocaust. Since Wiesel was only steps away from death, one wrong action could send him into the pit. It is impossible to try to put ourselves in his place. To understand that degree of fear, death, and dehumanization. We have the moral obligation to stop this from occurring again. If we value our lives, we must value all life. We must stand up for the rights of everyone. While today, the Uighur Muslims may not be facing the same punishments the Jews did, they are still facing inhumane conditions due to their religious beliefs. Not only are they not allowed to practice their religion, but they are forced to go against it: to eat pork and chant sentences against Islam. The torture continues as, Muslims are forced to take injections that render them infertile to shrink the Muslim population. This is an ethnic cleansing. These events bring us back to a

life-lesson we learned as a child, treat people the way you want to be treated. It is our duty to help others by raising awareness of these atrocities and participating in national protests to expose the issue to create much needed change.

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HIGH SCHOOL ESSAY
HONORABLE MENTION

MARIELLE SEIGEL

Marielle Seigel

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10th Grade

Stand Together

Gestapo. Ghettos. Genocide. “Never Again” means condemning the injustices of the Holocaust and making sure that they are never repeated.

Gestapo. During the Holocaust the Gestapo, the German secret police under Nazi rule, partook in horrible, ruthless crimes against foreign Jews. Many of them are outlined in *Night*, by Elie Wiesel, who is a Jewish Holocaust survivor: “Without passion or haste, they [the Gestapo] shot their prisoners [foreign Jews], who were forced to approach the trench one by one and offer their necks. Infants were tossed into the air and used as targets for the machine guns” (page 6). It is horrifying to think about how foreign Jews, from infants to adults, were brutally murdered by the Gestapo just because of their Jewish identity. I believe that no one should be discriminated against, especially for their identity. Your identity is something that you should be able to showcase and be proud of. But, during the Holocaust the Gestapo took that pride away from the foreign Jews, which is something that should never be repeated again.

Ghettos. Jews during the Holocaust were forced out of their homes by the Germans and subjected to living in ghettos, areas where only Jews were forced to live. The Germans made sure to keep the overcrowded ghettos isolated: “But, as it [the home in which Wiesel’s family lived for a time] occupied a corner, the windows facing the street outside the ghetto had to be

sealed” (page 11). In turn, when an inspector of the Hungarian police, a friend of Elie’s father, tried to warn the Jews in Elie’s town (Sighet, Transylvania) about danger, the Jews were not able to open the windows in time and speak to the inspector. It is extremely discriminatory how Jews were forced to be isolated from non-Jews during the Holocaust. I believe that there should always be equality and that no one should ever be forced out of their home, like the Jews were during the Holocaust; this is why it is important to recognize the injustices that occurred during the Holocaust, so that we can recognize similar injustices that occur today and work together to stand against them.

Genocide. 6 million Jews and millions of others were murdered during the Holocaust due to the Nazi Party’s orders. Many of them were sent to concentration camps, where they were either subjected to horrible conditions or killed: “Béla Katz, the son of an important merchant of [Elie’s] town, had arrived in Birkenau with the transport one week ahead of [Elie and his father]...He [Béla Katz] told us that having been chosen because of his strength, he had been forced to place his own father’s body into the furnace” (page 35). It is terrible to think about how so many people were murdered in concentration camps. Also, it is horrifying how the Nazis would make sons kill their own fathers if the sons wanted to stay alive. I think that no one should be murdered because of their identity and that family members should not have to choose between their life or the life of another family member. The murders that occurred during the Holocaust should never be repeated again.

As an “upstander” and a person who bears witness to the stories told by those who survived the Holocaust, I have the responsibilities of listening with open ears and listening with an open heart in order to ensure that the phrase “Never Again” becomes a reality. I believe that it is important to not only recognize the injustices that occurred during the Holocaust but to really

understand what happened during the Holocaust and why it should never happen again. Moishe the Beadle, a foreign Jew who survived the slaughter of foreign Jews, came back to Sighet to warn Elie and the rest of the Jews about the danger to come. But, the Jews of Sighet would not listen to Moishe the Beadle: “But people not only refused to believe his [Moishe’s] tales, they refused to listen” (page 7). Not even Elie, who Moishe the Beadle helped study Kabbalah, would believe Moishe. I believe that in contrast, it is important to believe and listen to witnesses of the Holocaust because by doing so, I can learn from the experiences of Holocaust survivors in order to make sure that the injustices that occurred never happen again. Even though it may be hard to hear about the injustices that occurred during the Holocaust, an upstander bears witness.

As a global community, I believe we must work together in order to maintain a place where everyone feels safe. We can do this by being upstanders and calling out any anti-Semitism or hate we see or hear because hate has no place in our community. We must work together to maintain a place where people are not discriminated against because of their identity. We can do this by continuing the increased implementation of teaching about tolerance and acceptance in our schools. We must stand together against hate and intolerance to foster a safe and accepting community for all.