

HOLOCAUST & HUMAN RIGHTS
ART & WRITING CONTEST 2022
MIDDLE SCHOOL ESSAY
FIRST PLACE

PHOEBE ROSENBERG

A Look At Our Past and Our Future

“In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.” This powerful quote by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., means it is up to regular people, like you and me, to not stand idly by and be a witness to injustice; we must take action. By taking action, we become upstanders not bystanders. It is our responsibility as citizens of the world to be upstanders in our schools, our community, and in the world. Unfortunately, there have been times in history when we could have used more upstanders. The Holocaust, the mass murder of Jewish people during World War II, was such a time. Although the Holocaust was one of the most horrific atrocities that ever happened in human history, there were courageous upstanders who risked their own lives to rescue thousands of Jewish people who would have otherwise perished.

The Holocaust started in 1941 in Germany, and lasted for years. The Holocaust happened because after Germany lost World War I, Adolf Hitler blamed the loss on Jews and said the only solution was to eliminate all Jewish people. Subsequently, Jewish people in Germany were rounded up and sent to concentration camps where they were killed. Shockingly, the citizens of Germany and neighboring countries, stood by and allowed this genocide to happen. Irena Sendler, a Catholic social worker in Poland, was one of the incredible upstanders during the Holocaust. She saved 2,500 Jewish children from the Warsaw Ghetto from 1942 to 1943. She saved these innocent children by working in the Children's Division of Zegota, a Polish underground network of women, whose mission was to save Jewish children from the death camps. She worked secretly and tirelessly to save as many Jewish children as possible.

Irena Sendler's actions made her an upstander in that she risked her own life and the lives of her family to save others. She smuggled hundreds of Jewish babies and children out of the Warsaw Ghetto and rehomed them with new identities. Ms. Sendler defied the government because she knew right from wrong, and she held strong to her beliefs. She would not be a bystander to the murder of countless innocent children. She often had to make quick and risky decisions in order to be an upstander. Eventually, her

actions led to her arrest, and she was sentenced to death, but was freed when someone bribed her guards. She lived the rest of her life as a social worker who helped others, but her legacy is that she and her network saved thousands of Jewish children from the death camps.

I was an upstander once, just like Irena Sendler. This past year, I was in gym class with a girl who had a disability. The gym teacher said, "find a partner." Everyone picked their friends but nobody asked the girl with the disability to join in. I felt bad that nobody asked to be her partner. That's when I realized I should ask her. I did just that, and she said "Yes"! Ever since then, other people have been asking her to join in and she has never been alone in gym class since. Obviously, my actions as an upstander were not to the degree of Irena Sendler, I didn't save any lives by asking someone to be my partner. However, if we all make small decisions to be an upstander, together we can change lives.

Irena and I made a difference by making the often unpopular choice to be an upstander. No one will ask you to be an upstander; that is up to you and your conscience. That is what Irena Sendler and I did. Nobody asked us to do it; we did it ourselves. Bystanders, on the other hand, take the easy way out by doing nothing. Bystanders during the Holocaust, didn't have the courage to make a difference. They stood by and allowed fellow humans to be murdered. Today, as we all know, Russia and Ukraine are at war. People are comparing this war to the Holocaust since innocent people are being ruthlessly killed. However, during the Holocaust there were very few upstanders, whereas today, there are thousands or even millions. Even though there are upstanders around the world trying to help Ukraine right now, it's simply not enough. If everyone in the world made the choice to take action against injustice, we could change the future. We need to learn from the lessons of our past. We need to stand up, not stand by. We need more Irenas in this world!

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ART & WRITING CONTEST 2022
MIDDLE SCHOOL ESSAY
SECOND PLACE
MAYA LEVIN

What it's like to live in a concentration camp

It was a cold, rainy afternoon. Lips were trembling. Hands were shaking. There was no talking. You could only hear the loud heartbeats and the heavy, scared breathing of others. Your hair is soaking from the rain. Your eyes gaze past the electric fence, the uncontrollable feeling of wanting to go. Wanting to leave. Wanting to be anywhere else but where you are right now, at this very moment. You feel trapped. Hunted down. Watched. Your brain is filled with all of those scary moments. The gunshots. The yelling. The crowds. But now, it's all silent. You're all alone. Who knows where your family is. Dead? Hurt? Alive? You'll never know, and you don't want to. You clench your stomach with your muddy hands. It's grumbling and rumbling, but you can't do anything about it. You look up, down, to the side, it's the same thing. Nazi's. Guns. You see them almost pull the trigger. You quickly pick up your shovel, and start digging even faster than before. You see an older man, around the age of your dad. He puts his tools down, and wipes the sweat off his face. He sits down on the floor, all sandy and rocky, just for a quick break. It almost looked like it happened in slow motion. "BOOM!!" One of the Nazi soldiers shoot. He falls to the floor. Blood dripped down his body. They then pick him up and put him in one of the holes that you dug.

The next morning, nothing was different. Same as yesterday. But you notice that there are more guards. Better weapons that the Nazi's have. Your hands shake. You've been in this camp for months now, you knew it was ought to happen. But you couldn't say anything. You kept your mouth shut, just like you've been doing. You want to rest. You want to not work anymore. You haven't been able to sleep for days. If you do, you're outside on the ground, in the cold. But they won't allow it. They'll shoot you. You see their fingers move, gripping the gun tighter. You have no place to go now. You're stuck. You close your eyes. Just breathe.

The Nazi's shoot. Everyone falls. Puddles of blood. They laugh. They move on. No sort of reaction. They don't know what they've done. It makes you mad. They killed over 6 million jews. No reason. Just because. All those young people, just killed. They could've lived a longer life, but they couldn't. Not all parts of history have happy endings, like this one.

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ART & WRITING CONTEST 2022
MIDDLE SCHOOL ESSAY
THIRD PLACE
ARIELLE GOLDNER

What is an upstander? An upstander is someone who goes out of their way to help others. An upstander is someone who is selfless and thinks of others' needs when they witness something not right. An upstander is a person everyone should look up to. " In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends. " Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said. This is a great reminder to stick up for a friend because the silence of your friend is worse than the words of the bully. Sometimes sitting and watching can hurt more than the actions or words being spoken upon someone else.

My great grandma Rose survived the Holocaust because of upstanders. I would not be alive if it weren't for a family of upstanders. My great grandma was twelve when Nazi's invaded Poland where she grew up. She snuck over to a local Catholic family that she knew. She asked them to take her in. This family decided to take action, an action that saved my great grandma's life. This family chose to be the upstander. The family disguised her as a cousin visiting town. She was scared and alone, having been separated from all her family. When the Nazis did house checks she was "the cousin", this family did what was right and protected young Rose at all costs. They risked their own lives to protect her. The family that cared for my great grandmother lived on a farm. Grandma Rose worked and helped take care of the animals. I always remember how much my Grandma Rose loved animals. This family of upstanders stuck with Rose the whole time, they never gave up or let her go off on her own.

Now when I think of upstanders, I think of this wonderful family who saved not only my great grandmother but my family and my life. Ever since the war, my great grandmother knew what it

was like to be in the shoes of someone in need, so she became an upstander. Speaking up for what she believed in and for others whom she cared very much about, donating to people in need, feeding the hungry, and so much more. I will never forget what my great grandmother went through and the sacrifices that she made to become an upstander and help others. I aspire to be just like my great grandma Rose someday. When I hear or witness someone bullying my classmate or friend, I will speak up. I have also taken a stand against discrimination of people based on their race or religion. For example I have attended a Black Lives Matter protest. It is important for me to stand up for others even if it puts me at risk. I hope my grandma's story inspires others to be upstanders as well.

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ART & WRITING CONTEST 2022
MIDDLE SCHOOL ESSAY
HONORABLE MENTION

ZOYA NABEEL

“Save one life and it’s as if you’ve saved all of humanity.” -Islamic hadith and Jewish proverb

This encapsulates everyone who made the decision to stand up when it mattered. The book *The Grand Mosque of Paris: A Story of How Muslims Rescued Jews During the Holocaust* by Karen Ruelle and Deborah Desaix provides insight of the Islamic communities role during the Holocaust. At this time, Jewish people fled to France, taking flight from Nazi rule. But in the 1940s, the Nazi’s conquered France. Jewish people soon found shelter in The Grand Mosque of Paris, at the center of the Islamic community. Millions who fled concentration camps were provided a home at the Mosque. When the government scanned the Mosque as rumors circulated of refugees taking shelter, the Mosque still admitted people. The fact that they didn’t stop helping refugees is heartwarming. By doing this, the Islamic community was communicating

“We may be different, but we’re all human beings. Shouldn’t we lend a helping hand to others when we have the power to?”

Being an upstander changes the course of someone’s life. If the Islamic community hadn’t advocated for Jewish refugees then millions would have been placed in dangerous situations. Advocating is speaking up for marginalized voices and replacing their silence with expression. Personal beliefs shouldn't determine whether we help another but should instead encourage us to build connections with our neighbors. At the end of the day, we’re all human beings, but how we rise up in times of prejudice is the true test of character.

Raising your voice inspires others to do the same. This cycle of giving never ends. Albert Assouline was a Jewish Algerian who escaped from a prisoner-of-war camp in Germany and found refuge in Paris. After the war, he settled back in France and dedicated his life to helping others in need. When someone does something nice for us, we pass that feeling on to another. Paying it forward produces a group of people spreading kindness. We have privileges in life, but unless we use them to advocate for others, they lose their purpose. So, when you stand up for someone, it may seem like nobody's listening, but every ripple makes an ocean leading us to the sea of the future.

After reading this book, I was surprised I hadn't heard of the role the Islamic community played during the Holocaust. It led me to wonder why this story is almost forgotten. The fact that this story isn't well known is heartbreaking, because it undermines the kindness Muslims exemplified. We can't tell the full story if we leave out characters. We highlight certain parts, but instead we must include many perspectives, for this will end the tale. Hearing this story, a window of light opened up. As a Muslim girl aspiring to make change, this makes me proud of my religion. For when the questions of the world arise, we must look to the past for answers and pave the way into the future.