

2017 Elie Wiesel Competition

3rd Place Junior Essay

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Justice Starts with the Youth

The Holocaust is “the mass murder of Jews under the German Nazi regime.” Millions were killed in concentration camps, while the more fortunate remained hidden from the Nazi police. Individuals such as Hanns Loewenbach and Elie Wiesel are survivors of the Holocaust and shared their stories with the world.

After watching the video of Hanns Loewenbach talking about his life during the Holocaust, I had many thoughts and reactions. I found it unnerving to see how vivid the Holocaust remained in his mind. Hanns would carry the memories of the atrocities of the Nazis for the rest of his life. This stuck out to me because it was clear that tragedies such as the Holocaust were not only devastating to those who were killed, but also those who would live to carry the memories of what had happened.

I was riveted by Hanns’ perseverance to keep him and his family away from the Nazis. The measures he took to avoid the concentration camps and the Nazis took much bravery, courage, and strength. His story continues to impress and inspire me and others who are learning about the Holocaust.

His story moved me because it was evident that Hanns and so many other Jews like him lived in so much fear for a big part of their lives. I was appalled to learn how much his life was altered by the Nazis. Everything he worked for, like college, was crushed when Hitler came to power. His story helps to inspire courage in future generations such as mine. His story remains to provide lessons from the past in the hopes that they will not be repeated.

Hanns survived the Holocaust to tell his story, so that it could be passed on to generations after him. As a member of a younger generation, it is crucial that I learn from the experience of the Holocaust. As George Santayana once said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” This film has inspired me to be an advocate for justice.

Differences in individuals leave many opportunities for discrimination and prejudice. When people think of prejudice, they usually think of culture or race. However, much prejudice among younger generations is based on social status, appearance, and personality. Many kids are discriminated against because they are simply not like the other kids, which make them easy targets for bullying.

Being a bystander helps no one, and I am called upon to be an upstander and to fight for the victims of discrimination and prejudice. This film illustrates how discrimination can increase rapidly if no one is willing to stand up for what is right. Discrimination still exists in society today, and the nation must pull together to fight it, no matter how small the form. I am inspired to be an advocate of justice in my life because I want to make a better future by learning from the experiences of those that have gone before me.

As I grow up, I should take more responsibility for advocating for justice. By accepting this responsibility, I will make decisions that will positively affect the people around me. I think there are

many ways that I can learn to accept responsibility for what I do and how it affects others and the world around me.

Ignorance was a major cause of the Holocaust because many people judged others without having an understanding of their differences. I think that it is my obligation to branch out and learn about people who are different than me, whether that be in race, religion, or lifestyle. If I learn more about those that are not like me, I am more likely to be less prejudice, and I learn to accept the differences between others. In meeting people who are different than us, we realize that we have more in common than we may have originally realized. Organizations such as Bridge Builders help kids to venture out of their comfort zones to learn about the diversity of those who live around us.

I have come to realize that as I become involved in social media and other forms of communication, I am face with more responsibility. It is easy to say things that I might regret when I am hidden behind a screen. I am responsible for how I act and what I say behind the shield of an anonymous comment or a phone screen. If kids everywhere are aware and cautious of what they say on social media, it will make less instances of cyberbullying, which will have a positive effect on many people's lives.

I also think it is my duty to be there for anyone who is having a hard time. People need to be more empathetic and learn how to put themselves in someone else's shoes. Encouragement is a big part of being a good person and friend for those around me. It is an easy way to take responsibility, and it always has a positive outcome for the person you are encouraging. I feel that along with encouraging others that are down, it is important to never encourage those who are bullying and to be an upstander. These are major responsibilities I take on, especially as a middle school student.

It is important that everyone thinks about the choices they make, as not to do something that they will regret or be ashamed of. "Life is about choices. Some we regret some we're proud of. Some will haunt us forever. The message: We are what we choose to be." –Graham Brown