

3rd Place Junior Essay
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Do They Live On?

The Holocaust was a tragic time in history that forever changed humanity, and the hatred it produced still trickles into our lives today. During the time of the Holocaust, millions died at the hands of Hitler's Third Reich. Today, racism and hatred are taking a new face, and with online interfaces, messages can range far and wide in a millisecond. Keeping the Holocaust alive is essential to continue learning from our grave mistakes. We, as a society, keep the Holocaust alive with witness testimonies that can be found in books and videos or survivors' interviews. These accounts are so important because they shed light on this tragic chapter of humanity and educate people so this never happens to us again.

The things that we do to keep the Holocaust in the minds of the public and not forgotten include reading books written by Holocaust survivors, watching videos about the events, and giving our listening ear to survivors' testimonies. First of all, the books that have been written about the Holocaust provide a deeper understanding of the innermost thoughts that people had during that time. In the *Diary of Anne Frank*, a young girl in Amsterdam went into hiding. "It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out..." (Anne Frank). Another book describing a Holocaust experience is *Night* by Elie Wiesel. He describes his horrible experience in Auschwitz involving being worked nearly to death, losing his parents and sister, and nearly freezing to death as the war was finishing. Elie wrote about his trek through the cold, "The icy wind whipped my face. I was constantly biting my lips so that they wouldn't freeze. All around me, what appeared to be a dance of death" (Elie Wiesel). Secondly, we had the privilege of hearing a survivor speak at our school. This was a unique experience that tragically cannot exist much longer; but, watching this survivor's testimony on video, with Oprah Winfrey and Elie Wiesel when he was still alive, was powerful as well.

When he was still alive, we could ask him questions, a leisure that is not provided in books. This lets us know more details than what he included in his writing. The fact that videos are so accessible makes them powerful tools to educate and spread awareness around the world. Hearing the voice of someone who has done so much in his life and feeling his courage to tell their story in person is so powerful. Elie Orrin visited our school and hearing her voice made the Holocaust that much more real for everyone there. It is a shame that we cannot experience this for much longer, as those who survived are nearing the end of their lives, so using other means of communicating their stories is essential if the memory is to live on. These things that we do to keep the Holocaust alive in our schools, homes, and lives keep their memory from ever being forgotten, a vital step forward in humanity proving that we could be better than the people who did this, and we can prevent it in the future.

We keep the Holocaust alive to alert our young to the signs of repeating history, to make the story of the Holocaust remain raw and untwisted by the powers of authority, and to avoid people becoming blind of human nature and exclusion. First and foremost, hate is becoming more normal in the media age that we live in. Young and impressionable people are our future, and if they become insensitive to hate and negativity, then they won't notice when the political climate starts to deteriorate. The people during the time of the Holocaust were shocked when people started dying; but, they overcame that and continued moving on until they were on the chopping block. I often wonder why these people did not see these terrible beast staring them in the face before they were killed. If we allow our children to understand the Holocaust and keep teaching these important topics in schools, then our youth can prevent us from falling into the same trap once again. Elie Wiesel's father said, "There are rumors, my father said, his voice breaking, that we are being taken somewhere in Hungary to work in brick factories. It seems that here, we are too close to the front..." (Elie Wiesel). This was a complete lie, but they believed that they would be given a better life. This resembles those who come to the United States, only to find camps separating parents and children, people starving, and the

government trying to cover it up. Next, if we allow the exact details of the Holocaust slip from our minds, then the facts can be twisted and used against us in the future. Leaders will have the power to threaten us with the situation of the Holocaust, and other times like it. If the books and videos still exist and if we keep passing on this story, then this can serve as a learning experience not a stepping stone for power. People want to exploit the catastrophe to achieve their own goals.

At the other extreme, there are those who choose to believe that the Holocaust did not happen. If these groups get traction and more people deny the Holocaust or that this horrendous act was less than it was, then we risk having this memory, due respect and reflection, become twisted and corrupted with those who do not believe the facts, and we lose this dark learning experience that we have been provided. Finally, if we keep teaching the Holocaust and we keep having intelligent conversations, then we will continue to be reminded of the extent that human nature can come to. It has been proven time and again in history that we exclude people that are different from us, and we hate others for what they cannot change. It is a naïve assumption that exclusion will never reach the level it did then. The moment that we can stop fear from evolving into hate is the moment that we ensure that all future generations are safe from the monster that we can become. It is vital that we all know that we can become brutal and violent when we are under the powerful control of lies, and we should be aware of this; for if we are not, then we will be blind to our own flaws, and we will be no better off than we were.

We keep the Holocaust alive in many ways, like with books, videos and survivor visits, and all of these are important, so that we can protect our future and let this terror reside only in our past. We must resist the corruption of our present. "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again" (Maya Angelou). The Holocaust changed the way that we view our own personal capabilities as humans, and we recognized that hate crimes can occur. If we are silent, then we are no better than those inflicting pain on others. Now that we are in the age of connectivity, we can use this to spread the good and hinder the hate. If we used these times in history

as guidebooks as to what not to do, then we just might have a brighter future. Now is the time to keep the wounds of mass murder raw on our flesh and prevalent in our minds; for if this memory dies, as time moves on, then history would undoubtedly repeat itself someday. It is our conquest, so do they live on?