



FRIENDS OF
SIMON WIESENTHAL CENTER
FOR HOLOCAUST STUDIES

SPIRIT OF HOPE 2010

VOICES OF YOUTH ESSAY CONTEST



“Think higher. Feel Deeper”
~Elie Wiesel



“When thought becomes excessively painful, action is the finest remedy.”
~Salman Rushdie

FIRST PLACE

Be the Change that You Wish to See in the World

Author: Sarah Stockall

School: Milton District High School

Be the change that you wish to see in the world. These words have left an imprint in my heart, forever reminding me that one individual is blessed with the potential to make a difference. Anne Frank once confessed, "How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." A man by the name of Mahatma Gandhi dedicated his life to peaceful protest in hopes of achieving human rights for the nation of India. This act of bravery established that one individual heart is vast enough to change the world for the better. Humankind has been divided by the walls that separate us, built upon tenuous fears and lack of human understanding. Over time, these walls have grown so thick as to allow devastating crimes against humanity. Above all, the Holocaust has proven to be the most powerful illustration of the hatred within the human soul. However, you and I possess the tools that equip us to smash the walls of prejudice, and shed light upon the world's darkness. This is our only hope for humanity. In the words of Salman Rushdie, "When thought becomes excessively painful, action is the finest remedy."

These words of wisdom posed an urgent question in my mind: How can I take action, in order to make a difference? Through reading memoirs such as *Night* by Elie Wiesel, and visiting the Simon Wiesenthal Center, I was transported back to a time of painful memory, when one man's hatred could manifest itself as the mass murder of millions. A spark of interest was then ignited, inspiring me to take action in the prevention of prejudice. I now realize that although education is vital, learning about the Holocaust is not enough when unwarranted hatred still exists among us. We must take action to ensure that catastrophes such as the Holocaust have no chance of survival. Every so often the world bears witness to ordinary people who rise above the universal barriers of prejudice, individuals like myself.

Soon I began taking notice of cruel remarks in the hallways, comments of hatred on the internet, and intolerant opinions on race, religion, and sexual orientation. Recently, I was dumbfounded to hear a friend of mine speaking openly of his unjustified hatred of gays, announcing his disgust for the entire cafeteria's entertainment. I could stand it no longer, and questioned his groundless argument. What have gay people ever done to you? How do their decisions affect your life? What is your purpose in hating them? After he could provide no answers to these questions, he left the cafeteria, ashamed of his ignorance. Acting as a bystander today is no better than acting as a German in the 1940's, who watched as their Jewish neighbours were taken from their homes to Auschwitz. Their deaths could have been prevented if only people had taken action. I refuse to stand by as a spectator to the show of prejudice, for it is my moral imperative to rise above intolerance.

At Milton District High School, I walk through the hustle and bustle of the hallways and look upon the many colourful faces pushing hurriedly past me. A sense of pride envelops me, as I witness the outcome of Salman Rushdie's words. Through challenging the evils of prejudice we have become—"one school, one voice, one world." I have been given the tools for tolerance; it is my mission to build my life upon them.

SECOND PLACE

“Think Higher, Feel Deeper”

Author: Davina Clements

School: School of Experiential Education

“Think higher, feel deeper” holds a lot of meaning and various interpretations. My understanding of these words takes me back to my childhood, teaches me the ability of the mind, and encourages hope.

The world I live in today seems different than the world I perceived as a child. We use the word “Impossible” in our daily vocabulary. When did this happen? When did things reach a level of impossible? As a child I remember day-dreaming the infinite possibilities that life has to offer me. Am I so old I’ve forgotten? As a Canadian teenager, “Think higher, feel deeper” represents my inner child who believes in good and whose stories always end up with good triumphing over evil. How did children of the world grow up and reach a point where they become the villains? Perhaps these people who commit acts of evil have forgotten their infinite possibilities and have in turn limited themselves mentally. I do not want to be a part of the world where my possibilities are taken because another being has caged their own mind. I do not want to be a part of the world where impossible exists.

The ability of the mind is incredible; this quote reminds me that the mind is ever powerful. I believe it is wise to recognize this as the mind can be considered an essence, a divine look into our being. The human mind can invent and create. We have the aptitude to create something from nothing and twist and turn the atoms of our imagination. “Think higher, feel deeper” encourages me to go beyond pure, to go above all the good I know, because there is no limit. It encourages me to feel deeply, to understand emotion and not simply feel it. This can teach us a lot in life. If we think greatly and refuse to reduce our thinking to that of lesser, darker thoughts, then we can feel intensely and genuinely.

This quote by Elie Wiesel gives me hope. I have faith in my community and in the power of emotion. A Buddhist monk once told me that “a tormented mind projects a tormented world”. Therefore, to project a beautiful world, we must have a beautiful mind. There are all kinds of evil in this world that destroy entire populations of humanity, but I still carry hope. A deep kind of optimism brought on by a higher kind of thinking. “Think higher, feel deeper” encourages me to feel immensely and thereby create power. When the barriers are removed from our minds, our community grows stronger and produces outcomes far beyond that of mere action. When good is acknowledged evil begins to vanish.

In conclusion this quote makes a difference in my life because it pushes me to search for the deeper meaning of thought and emotion, be it in my childhood, in the mind, or in hope. I would like to extend my thanks to Mr. Wiesel for reminding me of infinite possibilities.

THIRD PLACE

Author: Aeman Ansari

School: Rick Hansen Secondary School

The process of living is full of great awakenings. Living in a microcosm many individuals are ignorant of the world's issues. The relevance of mishaps and tragedies goes as far as their effect on us. In these modern times, with the fast pace life, we all overlook the troubles of others because of the lack of knowledge and interest. Elie Wiesel's quotation "Think Higher. Feel deeper" portrays the idea of being able to care and think about others by feeling their pain. If we are prosperous, happy and successful instead of focusing on all our luxuries, we should take a minute to realize the struggles people overcome to survive.

In my life reading was the key to bring me away from my ignorance. The effect was both drastic and everlasting. Reading books such as "Night", "Glass Castle", "A Thousand Splendid Suns" and many others I started to see beyond the life I have. The perseverance of the protagonists in these stories inspired me to begin my quest for change. Before my life was nothing but a series of actions to fit in. The knowledge I received allowed me to start joining clubs to earn money for charities and writing blogs for victims of violence. The power of knowledge has driven countless individuals to take a stand. The knowledge that I have received from literature and from astonishing individuals such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Anne Frank have brought me to realize the importance of acceptance. Our lives go as far as we direct them but the life of someone incapable of an education goes as far as the aid the individual receives.

"Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance" (Martin Luther King Jr.) this quotation was said by a great human activist and is a perfectly accurate statement of my feelings. Not thinking about all that has occurred in history is the reason that people do not take action against all that can occur. The unbelievable steps of courage taken by people such as Nelson Mandela and Gandhi have encouraged me to take up a role of leadership in my school. The responsibility that I have taken is one of motivating other students in the school to raise funds for various organizations, for example the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Beneath the years of fighting for freedom and equality are the people who have sacrificed everything for the life we have today. The trivial possessions we hold dearer than changing the life of another person will one day fade. If the world continues to be uninformed, we will all halt in a time of no return. A time in which we cannot repent for our selfishness. In the years to come I aspire to become a successful journalist in order to spread word of the world. The words spoken by Elie Wiesel assisted me in understanding the concept of being able to think beyond all boundaries and feel deeply enough to take action for those in great need.

TOP TEN FINALIST

Putting Others First

Author: Robert Koch

School: Milton District High School

In today's world of mass telecommunication, high speed travel and internet it is becoming ever increasingly difficult to live a life exclusively within one race or people. As racial diversity around the world becomes more and more common we face the challenge of prejudice and the necessary paradigm shift that must take place in the near future. If we are to live in a diverse society we must start to "think higher and feel deeper" beyond each of our particular views and begin to celebrate differences as we learn to accept others as fellow human beings.

To "think higher" in my mind is not necessarily to seek knowledge but to change the way you actually think and understand the world around you. When faced with someone from another culture I find that it is far easier to understand that person by attempting to look through their eyes than to simply observe and judge them through my own. By immersing myself in that other person's culture I have found in my own experience that a culture so foreign to my own is often less overwhelming than it appears. We may first seek knowledge in the pursuit of wisdom but it is far better to first break open the way we think. If one can begin to see the world from different points of view, I believe that "thinking higher" in itself will grow that same essential understanding.

Of course, as we strive to understand our world, we often face seemingly insurmountable obstacles that bring about hatred and division. Despite a greater understanding and in-depth knowledge of another culture it is still possible to grow a negative attitude towards a specific people. Throughout history we have seen people groups that have lived peacefully amidst each other for hundreds of years before suddenly growing a cruel hatred towards one another. As we can clearly see in the example of Rwanda in the 1990's, two people groups that at one time lived in peace turned neighbour to killer, friend to foe, in the attempt to eradicate each other. Now more than 10 years later we see a similar situation unfolding between the Muslim Arabs and Christian Africans in Sudan. When I look at these examples I must conclude that as people we should go beyond our simple understanding towards a much deeper thought.

I believe that religious or not, all humans have a basic feeling of right and wrong. When I read and hear about some of the atrocities that have stained our past and continue to paint the present I cannot accept that life is simply an interpretation. We must strive, as human beings all living on one planet, to teach each other how to feel, how to put others first, and most of all how to love. By setting an example of love and compassion we will teach others, even when we don't mean to, what it means to accept and love one another. I believe that just as smiling can make someone happy an example can change the way another person acts. By bringing these words to life in my future I believe that I will be able to not only learn to learn, but begin to discover a world full of new ideas and ways of thinking.

TOP TEN FINALIST

Never Again

Author: Colleen Angus-Yamada

School: Milton District High School

When I was a child, my father used to talk to me about the indignities of the Japanese internment camps and the effects discrimination has on its victims. I used to ignore the stories; I didn't want to taint my mind with thoughts of despair and cruelty. When I became a teenager I began to understand the impact the camps had on my family. With feelings of guilt, I listened to the stories of my ancestors; how they were deported, separated from family and friends, and forced to live in chicken coops.

I can relate to Elie Wiesel's novel, *Night*, for Auschwitz and the Japanese internment camps in Canada are clear examples of humanity's intolerance. Due to ignorance and prejudice many miscarriages of justice have gone unnoticed to this day. I have come to understand that it is the power of words, through speaking or writing, that discourages and ultimately prevents the horrors of the Holocaust and the Japanese internment camps from reoccurring.

By remaining silent after hardship and tragedy, humanity's veil of ignorance will only thicken. As Salman Rushdie has stated, "When words become excessively painful, action is the finest remedy." Without speaking of hardships, it will be difficult for mankind to "think deeper..." as Wiesel has stated, and "feel more."

Through the wise words of Elie Wiesel and Salman Rushdie, I agree that silence solves nothing; dwelling in despair and not speaking of tragedy is futile. My grandmother and great grandmother often reminisced of their times in the Lemon Creek camp. As the months went on, the women arranged picnics in the fields and swims in the stream. There was nothing the guards in the Japanese internment camps or the Nazis could have done to destroy the spirit of humanity. Elie Wiesel and my grandmother, Kiyoko Yamada, are prime examples of how the soul can never be imprisoned. Informing the world about such adversities allows for deeper thinking and healing, and with such knowledge, hopefully, comes prevention.

Armed with the knowledge of past crimes against humanity, I know I will stand up to injustice and intolerance whenever I witness it. Ending prejudice starts with me; by knowing what racism is, not yielding to discriminatory pressures, and understanding that bigotry still exists, I can help develop a more knowledgeable and humane society. The more people who speak out against cruelty, the more the world will understand the true meaning of "Never Again."

TOP TEN FINALIST

Solve for the Problem

Author: Adeola Odusanya

School: Notre Dame Catholic Secondary School

Elie Wiesel's profound words inspire me, "Think higher. Feel deeper." In my opinion, thinking higher can be intellectual, social or emotional. When a person thinks higher, they gain knowledge about their surroundings and are able to foresee situations dealing with themselves and others. The person gains the ability to step out of his or her life, out of their persons, into the space around them. The person begins to feel the plight of other's around them. For instance, the greatest inventors were only successful because they could understand the need for their inventions, even when they were not in need of their contraptions. Likewise, it is only when you 'put yourself in another's shoes' that you can truly feel their sufferings. As far as I know, if one does not understand Wiesel's words, Rushdie's advice of taking action when thought becomes painful cannot be followed. If, as an individual, I am not able to understand what other people endure, I can never be of use to them because my views will not encompass theirs.

Daily, the idea of sacrifice is instilled into our minds; people are beckoned to volunteer and make donations to many causes. The problem with this system is that most people do these sacrificial things out of ease and pity. They do not actually realise to what they are contributing. Therefore, I believe that if I learn to think about the strife that people with cancer endure, for example, I will not only feel pity for them because they are sick, I will also sense hope that they will be healed. Therefore, my actions towards them will not be impersonal, but will hold meaning in their lives and impact them positively. This is one example of truly thinking higher and feeling deeper emotionally and socially.

Furthermore, I recently developed a 'blog' where I post videos and comments that pertain to bullying and initiatives that combat bullying. In thinking intellectually of quick solutions that broadcast anti-bullying initiatives, I am able to reach out to people that are being bullied and bullies themselves. On the other hand, my solution to bullying would not be effective if I did not know the true plight of bullies and their victims. Essentially, thinking of solutions to a problem is good, but understanding the problem first is even better; therefore, thinking higher requires intellectual, social and emotional knowledge.

One of my goals is to gain the ability to view the world as an observer and to understand every point of view. If I do not do this my solutions will be useless and my entire objective unachieved. In essence, by reflecting on other's problems I can create solutions that work and that help all people of the world. We all should remember that while we are citizens of our respective nations, we are global citizens. We share a collective responsibility to make positive a impact in our lives, our communities and our world; it is only when we accept this, that peace will reign.

TOP TEN FINALIST

Author: Dragana Mirkovic

School: Glenforest Secondary School

Salman Rushdie once said, “When thought becomes excessively painful, action is the finest remedy.” I believe he meant, when bad memories invade, the only way to heal is by taking action; leave the past behind and start over. I experienced this through the loss of a loved one.

I entered the gate of my building and saw my father leaving for work. I waved goodbye and walked toward my mother and Princess, my dog. Princess gazed at me with her big brown eyes and I kissed her on the head. “Hi honey,” I said, acting like nothing was wrong, but something was different. She did not jump on me like she usually did, and she seemed out of place. She was weak from the cancer, and her tongue was blue. “Why is her tongue blue mom?” I asked fearfully. She ignored me and headed toward the building. We entered the elevator and Princess sat motionless, facing the wall. The elevator door opened and we slowly walked down the hallway. We’d been going through this for four months and I knew Princess was suffering. We entered the front door and Princess sat down, breathing heavily. “I’ll give her a bath, she’s probably hot,” said my mother. “Get her towel, I’ll get started.” I went to the bedroom and Princess was being placed in the tub. As I walked out of the bedroom I heard a boom in the bathroom and my mother screaming and crying, I could not understand what she was saying, I ran toward the bathroom, and saw my mother sitting with Princess in her arms. She ran to the hallway I was in, and placed Princess on the floor, “Call your father and sister,” she said, then began giving Princess CPR. In tears, I called them. “Princess is...come home.” I hung up the phone and sat beside my mother. Princess’s small arm hung over her chest and her blue tongue hung out of her mouth. My mother tried repeatedly, but soon stopped, picked Princess up and placed her gently on the bed. I guess she realized it was time to let her go. By now my sister and father had come. In tears, my parents waited in the living room for “Silent Friends,” a cremation shop, to take Princess’s body. As I lay on my bed with Princess I felt the bed shake, as if her soul was leaving earth. Princess’s urn now sits on a shelf, as a memory of a dog who was more like a sister.

After Princess died all I thought about were bad memories. Everyone said “get a new dog,” but would we love it? After two months we got a new dog, Blaze. We left the bad memories in the past and started over. Today I still remember Princess, but love Blaze with all of my heart. My family and I took action and that was our memory.

TOP TEN FINALIST

A Thoughtful Remedy

Author: Laura Sanchez

School: Glenforest Secondary School

One of Salman Rushdie's most inspiring quotes is "When thought becomes excessively painful, action is the finest remedy." This quote to me as a young Canadian individual signifies that we should strive to realize our ideas, so that they may be fruitful; in doing so we make way in our lives for the positive changes that come with a more proactive attitude.

What this means to me is to take the initiative to make decisions based on the views that I regard as important. In this way, they can be heard and possibly put into action for a purpose. Take for instance Holocaust Education Week, which is commemorated every year in a number of schools. During this time students have the opportunity to learn about the injustice that was endured by the Jewish population in Europe. The mass murder of millions inevitably caused a stir of emotions and reflection for me, because I live in a country like Canada that is free of religious persecution. For that reason I was prompted to take the action so frequently asked of us in films and books, which is always to remember history and in doing so we keep the memory of those who died alive.

If I put this quote into practice in my life, it will without question alter it, particularly because these words make me feel empowered to take the reins, when I have an ardent emotion or idea that inspires an action. Given that I tend to be more of a procrastinator this will be of significant value because it's a motivation to take a more applied approach to my thoughts and emotions. For example, taking time to talk to someone in order to alleviate strong emotions about a recent occurrence. Or following this a bit further it could also simply be to express myself and the ideals that I support and those I disagree with. Just like the speaker of this quote, Salman Rushdie, has done with his position on a variety of world issues.

In conclusion, the significance of Salman Rushdie's quote is to take action when you have strong convictions. Even if at times you are not sure if they are correct or are worried that they will be disputed. It persuades you to muster the courage to take hold of the remedy to any apprehension which is undeniably, a course of action.

TOP TEN FINALIST

Breaking the Cycle

Author: Judy Chan

School: Milton District High School

“When thought becomes excessively painful, action is the finest remedy.” – Salman Rushdie

The world is teeming with despair and misfortune. It seems to be an impossible feat to go by a single day without witnessing a great injustice before our very eyes. I hear racial slurs in the school hallways; I see fistfights in the cafeteria, violent messages scrawled on the bathroom against the wrongs in our communities. His words speak of the obligation that we have to humanity to rise up and break the cycle of immorality and make a difference in the world.

As a teenager, I am a member of the generation of apathy. Fewer and fewer young adults are aware of issues not only in the world, but also in their own communities. Record breaking lows of young voters cast their ballots in each election. Teenagers have been infected by a plague of lethargy and passivity so contagious, that it is rare to find a young adult with a working knowledge of the issues our world faces, let alone an informed opinion about any of them.

Humanity has grown far too accustomed to letting the pitch fly by, when it is our turn to bat. We have become far too comfortable in our Ivory Tower, as we become increasingly ignorant of a world we do not think concerns us. In this age, where information travels instantaneously, humanity has distanced itself farther from the world than it ever has before. As members of the human race, we owe it to ourselves to break this egregious cycle of apathy. We must speak out against what we know is wrong and reconnect with our world.

It is easy to accuse me, or any number of people, of being indifferent, or having a half-hearted interest in the world around us. Chances are it is true. It is far too easy to shrug off our responsibility as global citizens to be informed, to speak out against injustice, and to mobilize change. Starting a movement of change in the world is often misconstrued to be an impossible endeavour, but so few realize that it can be something as simple as standing up for the boy being picked on in the hallway, or casting that ballot in the local election.

Change in the world starts with an action, and the action begins with the individual. We, as individuals, as human beings, must find the strength and the courage within us to rise above our pre-programmed apathy, and become educated, become informed, and formulate opinions. We must summon the strength to break free of the cycle of inaction in which we have been trapped for so long, and overcome our fear of speaking out against what is wrong. We must take action. Only then, can we hope to live with integrity, knowing we have made a difference in the world.

TOP TEN FINALIST

Author: Antoniette Thavarajah

School: Notre Dame Secondary School

“When thought becomes excessively painful, action is the finest remedy.” – Salman Rushdie

This quote is truly inspiring and it enables one to understand that their thoughts, which they conceal from others, especially their loved ones, can be influential in the lives of the suffering around them. It compels others to open a new door for themselves and for others through their views. Sometimes as a teen, I think about actions that might lighten depressing events, which take place around me. These thoughts generally persist, and I want to speak out, but it is difficult. It is difficult because I fear what others might think about my opinions. As I think further about this quote, I am beginning to understand that I have not been just towards myself by concealing my plans about how I can make a small difference in the world.

Sometimes as I walk through the school halls, I walk away when I see someone being bullied and afterwards I think about the incident and I feel guilty; then, wanted to be influential, so I participated in anti-bullying campaigns within the school. As a teen, I face many negative pressures from peers and the society but as positive thoughts persist in my mind, I have an urge to stop thinking about unnecessary situations.

Through this quote, I am going to begin a life in which I will speak openly about my perspectives and my own beliefs instead of agreeing with others halfheartedly and concealing my opinions regarding a situation. In addition, if an element in my life keeps irritating me, I will try to resolve the situation through making the right decisions. Therefore, these words give me confidence and belief in the actions that I want to undertake. I do not want to be a bystander or a person that is masked by others' beliefs. I want to be a unique individual and help others through charity work, campaigns and by supporting the vulnerable. In addition, although women have equal rights in Canada, as a female I believe that the sense that men are the dominant sex is still apparent in many communities and I want to make a difference. In order to help others I believe I should reach to a position in which I am confident with my decisions and in my course of action instead of just thinking about what I could have done.

In conclusion, if all individuals believe that every situation that they experience throughout their life will only occur once, then every action they take will be a milestone in their path to enlighten the world. Mr. Rushdie's words are truly inspiring for teens all around the world that are thriving to take action and play a role in the society. This quote illustrates that individuals can be irritated by an event but the only way to eliminate the stress or the sense of guilt is by trying to take action and solving the problem. Therefore, I believe this quote will be definitely influential throughout my life, even beyond my teenage years.