The Henry Pestka
Art & Poetry
Contest

Presented by
The West Michigan
Holocaust Partnership

2022-2023: Never Forget
Visit

The Henry Pestka
Art & Poetry Contest

Student Exhibit
May 17- June 18, 2023

2022-2023: Never Forget

at
Frederik Meijer Gardens
and Sculpture Park

THE WEST MICHIGAN HOLOCAUST PARTNERSHIP
The Pestka Family, in memory of their father and grandfather, Henry Pestka, a Holocaust survivor, is proud to begin a new tradition in West Michigan - to bring Holocaust awareness and education to West Michigan students in grades 6-12 through an art and poetry contest. This contest is designed for students who have completed the Michigan state requirement on Holocaust education and enables them the opportunity to process and reflect on the concepts they learned through writing or art.

All too often, images of the Holocaust we remember are those created by the perpetrators. We see people humiliated, starved and beaten, dressed in rags or tawdry striped uniforms, and robbed of their humanity. If our study of the Holocaust ends there, we victimize these people a second time.

But when we engage with survivor testimonies or memoirs, we come to see those targeted by the Nazis as individuals, meeting them as people who gave and received love and for whom the memory of those they loved was a source of extraordinary strength. Love nourished their soul and sometimes inspired hope.

Though the Holocaust was a painfully tragic time in human history, there were everyday people who acted heroically, even when facing the most hopeless situations. Whether it was a Jewish prisoner who aided other victims, righteous gentiles who sheltered the Jews, or local people who spoke out, there were glimmers of hope in an otherwise terrible time.

Ideal for project-based learning, the West Michigan Holocaust Partnership came together with the Pestka Family to sponsor the Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest. The Partnership collaborated to curate a collection of high-quality, interactive resources and lessons, including a virtual fieldtrip to the West Michigan Holocaust Memorial, to support educators in creating an authentic and meaningful learning experience for students in meeting Michigan Holocaust and Genocide education standards.

As the foundation for students' Contest projects, educators were encouraged to use the Teaching the Holocaust curriculum and resources, along with the virtual fieldtrip to the Ways to Say Goodbye Holocaust Memorial at Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park.

The Holocaust is history's most extreme example of antisemitism, which is prejudice or hatred of Jews.

Why Is It Important for Students in Michigan to Learn About the Holocaust?

Antisemitism remains a persistent issue in Michigan.

- Less than 1% of Michigan's total population identifies as Jewish, yet in 2022, Michigan ranked 9th in the United States for antisemitic incidents.
- From 2021 to 2022 alone, there was a 36% increase in specific incidents of antisemitic harassment, vandalism, and assault in the United States, equating to the highest number on record since 1979.

Learning about the Holocaust can help students:

- Develop critical thinking and media literacy skills.
- Understand the roles that history, society, religion, politics and the economy can play in democratic values and human rights.
- Unpack and analyze the consequences of decisions and actions (or inactions) related to prejudice, stereotyping, racism, xenophobia, and hate.

In 2016, Michigan passed Public Act 170.

- All students in Michigan must receive six hours of Holocaust and Genocide education.
2022-2023: Never Forget

This year’s theme, *Never Forget*, honors victims and survivors of the Holocaust, their stories of loss and tragedy, but also their stories of strength and bravery in unimaginable circumstances.

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest was open to students in grades 6-12 across West and Southwest Michigan counties and closed February 10, 2023. Students were asked to submit an original poetry, prose or art project, incorporating the theme, along with an Artist or Author Statement.

A panel of judges, consisting of community members and educators, used a rubric to score each entry. Members of The Partnership with proximity to students, including all EGRPS faculty and staff, were not permitted to judge entries. Ten Finalists per grade were selected, and the top three Finalists per grade will be awarded prizes.

In this book, you will find:

- Each Artist's Statements for the exhibit's art pieces.
- All Authors' Statements and Writing Projects.

Searching for a specific Artist or Author? Entries are organized by grade and then alphabetically by last name.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

THE WEST MICHIGAN HOLOCAUST PARTNERSHIP
Learn more about the Holocaust, Henry Pestka, and the stories of West Michigan Holocaust Survivors

VISIT THE WEST MICHIGAN HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL WEBSITE
Explore the collection of stories, interactive maps, interviews, and photos.

In June of 2022, the West Michigan Holocaust Memorial was dedicated at Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park, and the West Michigan Holocaust Survivors website launched. In the first 24 hours, there were 48,000 attempts to take the site down.

WATCH A WGVU PUBLIC MEDIA DOCUMENTARY

L’dor V’dor: An Eternal Tree
Henry Pestka survived the horrors of Auschwitz. Pestka and the millions of Jews murdered during the Holocaust are now remembered with the dedication of the sculpture, Ways to Say Goodbye. There we talk with the sculptor and family unveiling West Michigan’s first public Holocaust memorial. L’dor V’dor explores art as education and its generational commitment to exposing atrocities against humanity. (26:46)

Defying Hitler
WGVU traveled with Joseph Stevens and his son to revisit some of the places of Joseph’s past. Joseph was part of the Polish underground. He was a hero. In the days of World War II, he was a shadow. (26:51)

Surviving Auschwitz: Children of the Shoah
In the waning months of World War II, two young girls from a Jewish ghetto in the heart of Poland were liberated from Adolf Hitler’s most notorious death camp, Auschwitz. At 6 and 10, Tova Friedman and Freida Tenenbaum were among the youngest of 7,000 prisoners found alive by a regiment of the Soviet army. Join us as they revisit the places of their past and share them with their own children. (1:26:50)

EXPLORE OUR COLLECTION OF RESOURCES
for Michigan Students and Educators

Curriculum & Resources
Teaching the Holocaust: A Guide for Michigan Educators

Take a Virtual Fieldtrip
to Ways to Say Goodbye at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park
Artist Statements

and

Art Projects

ALL GRADES
"Shoes"
Jonah B.
Grade 7
Jenison Public Schools

Artist Statement

To create this project, I used Photopea. First I made one shoe and sized it down. I copied it, made more shoes, and then organized them into a style I liked. I then copied and moved them into bunches. I used a brush to make the background and did light to dark layers and then created the wall. I used another brush, turned down the opacity and made the dirt and cloudy spots. I wanted it to look old and worn as I was inspired by a photo I saw at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum called “Victims’ Shoes at Majdanek.”

Last year when I went to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum with my family, we saw an exhibit full of shoes, and at the time I didn't really understand the story behind it. These shoes represent life and death in the concentration camps. The people trying to survive the death camps needed shoes that fit well because they were on their feet working from sunrise to sundown. It's horrible how much they suffered.

These shoes have stuck with me. The reason why I chose to draw them is because seeing the shoes made me feel disgust, anger, and fear. Jews were targeted because of their religion and their beliefs, because someone decided that they were inferior. But they were human beings. They had jobs, a family, a life! Each and every one of the shoes represent real living people who existed, and the shoes help us to Never Forget their memories and the horrors that they had to live through.

As a Jewish person, I don’t understand why the Holocaust happened. These people did nothing to deserve what happened to them. I have experienced Antisemitism and it feels horrible - and I know it is still happening to many Jewish people. Being Jewish where I live feels like you are different and not a lot of people know about it. Sometimes they don’t want to know more and sometimes they say or do things that are hurtful. It gets old after a while. I wish that people were more informed and that they would take the time to learn. Judaism says that asking questions is important because being curious is a good thing. It would be amazing if people were more curious about people who are different from them.

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest
Shoes
"Why Weren't You Here?"
Zacchaeus C.
Grade 7
Hudsonville Public Schools

Artist Statement

On the wall of a concentration camp they found the quote, "If there is a God he will have to beg for my forgiveness." That quote inspired me to make this art piece. The empty throne symbolizes that he wasn't there for their time of need.

The Holocaust was such a sad event that it doesn't feel right to add color. So I chose to use only pencil for my art to represent a world of gray sadness.

Though it feels like God forgot them, I think we must never forget.
Why Weren't You Here?

Zacchaeus C.
Artist Statement

We looked at the Darkness To Light: Mosaics Inspired By Tragedy at the Battle Creek Art Center. We were given the prompt to create a mosaic with mixed media about social justice; I chose to create one about gender equality.

It's an important topic to me because it was a serious issue, and still is. People are created equal, no matter their religion, race, or gender, but society didn't always treat these people equally. Over the years women have been getting more equal rights, and being treated as people instead of objects.

However, we can never forget where we came from and how things used to be. The same goes for the Holocaust, because even if people are more accepting now, and support people who are different from them, we can't change the past. We can bring awareness to it so the past doesn't repeat and we can move forward toward equality, no matter the gender or religion. We're finally getting close to creating the balance we need in society, much like yin and yang.
Balance Through Change
"Never Forget My Roots"
Andie O.
Grade 10
Lakeview School District

Artist Statement

My project "Never Forget My Roots" is about my experience learning to accept myself through my experiences of discrimination and oppression of my culture. I am a Latina born in Texas. Growing up, my culture surrounded me. I felt so loved growing up and surrounded by people who enjoyed our culture and embraced it immensely whenever they got to. The best memorable moments were our family parties; whether for holidays or just family reunions, we were constantly celebrating and staying connected. I remember moments when any kids in the family had sports events; most family members would wear matching shirts with our last names on the back. We would bring these sound makers to cheer as loud as we could to ensure the kids knew we were there for them and supported them.

Things changed in my family's lives, and we had to all go our separate ways. My mom, brother, dad, sister, and brother ended up moving to Michigan to a town called Rockford. I was really young at the time, almost 7 years old. I was too young to realize that not everywhere in the world people were like my family. Quickly I learned things as my family, and I started to step into this new community; we faced very unexpected things. My elementary classroom was the first time I had felt different; I had felt this terrible confusing feeling of alienation at such a young age that I didn't fully understand. I had never felt more inhuman before. I would be questioned by my peers on why I looked different and why I didn't look like them. I remember when my family and I would go out into public together, we would be stared at, watched, judged, and followed. I started to wonder what was wrong with my family and what was wrong with me? My pride for my family started to fade, making me feel so alone. Most of the time, my family and I had to sacrifice our identities and hide parts of ourselves for our survival. These times felt like I was being stripped of my culture and wasn't allowed to be me. As I've continued to grow, I realized these times left scars, making it difficult to accept myself. Although these times were unforgettable and will always be, they made me stronger and even more proud of who I am and my culture. This is why when my teacher asked us to create something with a message about social issues, I immediately thought about my culture and the stereotypes we are told and internalize.

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest
Never Forget My Roots

Andie O.
"73847 - Henry Pestka Tribute"
Kyleeana S.
Grade 10
Paw Paw Public Schools

Artist Statement

My project is about Henry Pestka and his "journey".

I read tons of poems and looked at different artworks, till I got an idea.

My project aligns with the theme; Never Forget because of the barbed wire and the broken-down wall, as him escaping. issues, I immediately thought about my culture and the stereotypes we are told and internalize.
73847 - Henry Pestka Tribute
"I Will Remember"
Laura G.
Grade 11
Plainwell Community Schools

Artist Statement

I chose to create a piece using acrylic paints and a black marker for the writing and smaller details, such as the eyes and the dots inside the white flowers. The painting includes two young people hugging; the woman representing a pre-war Jewish person who is wearing an everyday dress as well as a present day middle ages black man embracing her. The words "I will remember" encompass the two individuals in multiple different languages. From left to right the languages are: French, German, Spanish, English, Yiddish, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. Most of these languages I choose at random and either knew myself or had friends help to translate into "I will remember". However, I specifically included Yiddish because it is a language that is/was spoken by many Jewish individuals throughout Europe—especially before the Holocaust. Yiddish is a combination of Hebrew and other languages, such as German.

I painted the Jewish woman in an everyday dress instead of a blue striped concentration camp uniform to help show that people who experienced the Holocaust had a life before being stripped of their rights as human beings. Oftentimes when we think of people in the Holocaust, we recognize them as people, but do not take into account that they had a unique life before being sent to the camps or ghettos. In addition, when talking about the Holocaust, it is much easier to only see these people as a statistical number, not as individual people who had their own interests, complex emotions, and opinions—all of which are similar to our own nowadays regardless of the time period, race, religion or location. By choosing to dress the woman in clothes that a Jewish woman would be likely to wear before the Holocaust, I wanted to represent the woman and all others affected by the Holocaust as themselves, not adorned in Nazi regulated uniforms that served to strip them of their humanity. The black man embracing the woman in a hug is supposed to represent a present day person. The man can be interpreted as either Jewish or not, as Judaism is not a race but a religion and ethnicity.

However, regardless of if the viewer sees the man as a Jewish individual or not, the painting is meant to represent the theme "Never Forget" by showing two people from different time periods and backgrounds coming together to share the pain. It is important to grieve together as fellow human beings in order to never forget past and present tragedies. Only when humans see each other as humans, and not "them" and "us", will we be able to prevent tragedies from occurring. My project further aligns with the theme by the all-encompassing promise "I will remember" that surrounds the two different people. These words are important because it is our duty as people living in the present day to continue to educate, learn, talk, grieve and support each other in remembrance of human tragedies and triumphs. If we fail to remember, the people affected by the Holocaust will be lost to history. And if we fail to set our differences aside and come together as one human race, we will further divide ourselves away from one another. I hope my painting, regardless of reading my artist statement, displays this message for all of humanity clearly.

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest
I Will Remember
On October 27, 2018, 11 people were killed in the Tree of Life synagogue shooting.

Less than 12 hours later, I had my bat mitzvah. I stood at the bimah with police standing guard at the doors of Temple Emanuel to ensure I did not get shot while saying the Mourner’s Kaddish in memory of those who had lost their lives that morning. I’ve said the mourner’s kaddish each year since.

I felt guilty for celebrating my transition to Jewish adulthood on the same day as so many Jewish lives were stolen. However, as I have gotten older I have come to terms with the fact that mourning is only half the equation. To remember someone is to honor their death but it is also to celebrate their life.

I knew I wanted to include aspects of each type of remembrance: The eternal lantern, a symbol of lasting Jewish faith even through times of struggle; words from the mourner’s kaddish; branches extending from a single thumbprint a symbol or growth and connection; and l’chaim, to life. It is an homage to learning how to mourn and how to remember. I chose to use oil pastel because I thought the texture of the material best fit the design. The words and branches, however, are painted on with acrylic and expired watercolor paint.
To Life

עֲבוֹדַת לְיָלְוַת בֶּשְׁרִמָּה

Maialen M.
"Clay Tile Mosaic"
Aiden M.
Grade 11
Lakeview School District

The quote I made up, “even the darkest souls show light, no one is perfect” and the swirls in the tree represent the light the is unseen by color but it’s still being shown by the actions you make. The word darkest is broken because it actually broke on accident but I kept it that way because it was more powerful. The theme “never forget” aligns with my project by the light in the tree by never forgetting the light inside of someone.
Clay Tile Mosaic

EVEN THE DARKEST SOULS SHOW LIGHT

NO ONE IS PERFECT
Artist Statement

My mosaic tile is an evil eye that I made to portray the reflection of negative energy and protection from harm. This process was very time and mind consuming. I made each tile individually and had to piece each one back together after drying, like a very difficult puzzle. I used rocks on the outside to portray protection and guidance. The pupil is made of glass to portray the reflection of negative energies and help you move forward during hard times.

My piece is supposed to give the viewer a sense of safety, when looking deeper you understand the reason for each decision I made. The evil eye represents protection from things like jealousy and anger and reflects it onto the manifestation of these feelings. You will never forget the things in your past, the way things harmed you, negative words, etc. with the rocks I’m demonstrating a part of astrology, working with spirit guides will help lead you in a happier stronger direction without having to forget about your past, just grow from it. I want this piece to motivate and inspire other artists. This piece is very meaningful to me and I hope others see the beauty in the process and meaning.

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest
Reflection
Tikkun Olam (Hebrew phrase, meaning “world repair”)

The Holocaust was a horrible period in history, one that took the lives of over 11 million people, including 6 million Jewish people. Sometimes, it seems that devastating images of starved and hopeless people in rags and striped uniforms are all that remains of the Holocaust. But not only do these images only show a fraction of the story, they rob these people of their humanity. If we only remember them as victims, even in their death they are not free. Those who didn’t survive, they were human beings. They lived and loved a thousand times before they were cruelly taken away. They were grandmothers and grandfathers, sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers. They were someone.

If we instead remember those lost as the beautiful and complex people they were, and who they had the potential to become, we free them at last. It is our responsibility to remember and honor them, in that way, they live on. The birds represent the lost souls who are freed by our stories and remembrance.

This piece is a product of weeks of research into my own family history, and through my research I learned about the incredible people I am descended from. In the end, I chose to use a photo of my great Aunt Ruth as my reference. She was a strong woman who undertook the burden of remembrance after she escaped the Nazi regime through wit and courage, surviving well into her 90’s. Sadly, she lost family and friends along the way. These are the people I included in the piece, photos of her parents and grandparents, because they weren’t faceless victims, they were family.

As my Aunt Ruth stares determinedly ahead, she is passing the key of remembrance not only to me, but to everyone who has the courage to stand up against hatred.
Author Statements and Writing Projects

Grade 9
"Henry Pestka Never Forget"
Lillie A.
Grade 9
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Prose

Author Statement

My poem is about 9/11 and honors those who risked their lives. I looked back at the time I talked to my Uncle who lived in New York City at the time, and tried to put all of his emotions into the poem. My project aligns with the theme Never Forget as it shows that though lives were taken, they will never be forgotten.
Henry Pestka Never Forget

The things we forget and mistakes we make are bound to happen again. As you remember, time leaves a mark on your mind. Remembering is the first step to improvement. All of the mistakes that have happened in the past are bound to happen again if we don’t learn about history.

People don’t like things that aren’t familiar to them. So people can be mean and discriminate towards others based on differences. If we learn how to be accepting then we can be kind to all.

It doesn’t take much to be a good person, you need to be accepting, understanding of differences and kind, and it helps to not be naive. Knowing about the mistakes that have been made in history helps you become not naive and understanding. If you are sheltered to different religions and cultures then you will be less understanding of other people.

Being a bad person that isn’t kind and compassionate, racist, and is not understanding of different people has major downsides. An example is Hitler he was a bad person that discriminated against Jewish people as we know he is the reason that the 6 million Jewish people were killed in the Holocaust. Hitler after WW2 shot himself.

The better things you do the better you feel and the better outcome you have. It doesn’t take barely anything to be nice but it takes a lot more brain power and energy to be mean. Kindness has a better outcome in the world. It is a lot healthier for all.
"Never Forget"
Callen B.
Grade 9
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Prose

**Author Statement**

My project was an essay about why we should never forget the victims, survivors, and courageous people who either fought in the war or helped one another during it. I focused on three topics, the victims, survivors, and the courageous people who fought or helped one another by giving an example for each topic and elaborating on them. It aligns with the theme by talking about the people and why we should never forget them, and the importance of each and every one of them.
Never Forget

The importance of never forgetting the victims, survivors, and courageous people from World War II is crucial because it helps people nowadays realize what tragedy many people faced, it teaches us about how religious discrimination can take a turn and why it should not be tolerated, lastly, if not for the many courageous people who helped to win the war our world would be totally different than it is today.

World War II was the deadliest war in history, people were being killed just because of their religion. People faced so many tragedies whether that be from being a Jewish person at the time, or helping to hide Jewish people when they were in need. Also, looking back at more tragedies, people were sent to concentration camps, treated inhumanely for being overworked, underfed, and in most cases brutally abused. All of these instances were inhumane and no one should ever have to go through that regardless of race, religion, or beliefs.

Religious discrimination is when someone or a group of people is being treated differently compared to another person. In the case of World War II, it would be how the Nazis were against all Jewish people following Judaism, there was no apparent reason for this, one day this all just started. Jewish folks were being treated inhumanely and almost like animals, they would be herded through the streets, and marked with a yellow star, then transferred to concentration camps where they would be treated awfully. The big idea of religious discrimination is that someone or a group of people are treated differently than other groups and or people.

The soldiers who fought in World War II and all wars for that are a big part in keeping our country at stake, and safe. Without them, take, for example, World War II would've changed our world to this day. The religion, Judaism would be erased from society since that was the Nazi’s goal to accomplish. If that were to have happened there would be been lots and lots of fewer people, and Judaism would have been almost or all erased.

In closing, these are three reasons for the importance of not forgetting what helped and what our world could have been like today. We should realize what tragedy many people faced, how much the War teaches us about how religious discrimination can take a turn and why it should not be tolerated, and lastly, if not for the many courageous people who helped to win the war our world would be totally different than it is today.
"Never Forget"
Nora C.
Grade 9
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My poem is about the root of evil behind the holocaust. It is also about the terror and thoughts behind the holocaust.

I chose to write this poem because I feel that this type of genre is short and sweet. Poems can also be very powerful. They are an easy way to get your point across. I chose to write this poem about the source of evil who created the holocaust. Although this may be a dark topic, I think it is important to reveal the masterminds behind such tragedies.

I wrote many poems and picked the one I felt was most powerful. I then had my parents, peers, and English teacher read it over.

My poem aligns with the theme, never forget because it talks about where the root of the holocaust started. It is important to never forget what mistakes were made and why they happened so we know not to make them again.
Never Forget

Puppet master of propaganda
Center of evil
Mind filled with memories of abuse and mistrust
Paranoia sets in
Hungry for power
Searching for someone to blame
One pure race requires another to be erased
Well respected man, turned mad
Wanting more
Never satisfied
Dark, black heart, solid as coal
One pure race requires another to be erased
Mass genocide, for pleasure
Full train car, a way to erase
Burning smoke stacks, a way to erase
Gas chambers, a way to erase
One pure race requires another to be erased, never forget
"Never Forget"
Chloe C.
Grade 9
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Prose

Author Statement

My project is about the importance of not making jokes about serious topics. Making jokes allows the seriousness of topics to slip away each time. And that's why it's important not to make them.
Never Forget

Comical ideas about any topic invalidate the seriousness around it and how it should be respected. To believe one can laugh about it rather than take it seriously is the most common way of forgetting and moving past. The goal should be to force remembrance and honor the people who lived through World War two. In fact, it's been proven easier to be to cope with any traumatic events by making jokes. Psychology today states that, “Making a joke about a serious topic releases the tension and makes us feel more comfortable,” and that “In therapy, the tension is not meant to be cut but instead should be embraced.”

Jokes do make it easier to talk about the topic, however, I know from personal experience that it won’t be taken as seriously anymore. Comical distractions cause a loss of seriousness and respect for a topic, provide an easy way out of coping, and promote lies about a topic. 6 million Jewish people died in the Holocaust, and making jokes are invalidating every one of those lives.

How many times in your life have you heard the statement, “it was just a joke,” or “it's not hurting anyone.” these are the most used excuses that follow a racist, religious discrimination, or rape joke. While the Comedians themself may not promote or condone rape, they definitely perpetrate jokes about it. Or any other salient topics. Ending the harmful marks will end the disrespect. Laughing each time about cracks away at the feeling of remorse.

Communication is a wonderful thing. Expect when lies are being spread with that same communication. Lies are spread often when people make jokes, so to cut out the mistruths we should stop making jokes altogether, especially the jokes that aren’t true.

Therapy is the time when you suppose to embrace uncomfortable tension and feelings. Jokes do provide a feeling of comfort, but not a strong enough one that will last. Eventually, the feeling will collapse, and you will have wished you embraced everything you were feeling in the first place. Jokes get rid of the awkwardness between friends, so they don’t have to comfort you. Make them and yourself take it seriously. Feelings, not promoting lies, are all of the reasons why you shouldn't make jokes.
"Never Forget: The Perspectives of Time"
Lia D.
Grade 9
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

I wanted to write a poem that captures the different perspectives of the different groups of people that lived through the time. I pulled from information that I had read in books and did a little online reading. I wanted to create shocking and real imagery but also add thought provoking questions so that hopefully the reader consumes and keep this with them.
Never Forget: The Perspectives of Time

The dark haired powerhouse of the 1940s
Adolf Hitler reigned with fear, hungry for complete, suffocating control
His ugly morals burned into the withered hearts and minds of those who lived through the time
Who to trust, who to help, how to live?
Choking on fumes that snaked down their throats
Hunger gnawed at their bodies
The yellow star patch there on their shoulder
Weak knees crumpling
Hope seeped out of their feeble bodies
These are the Jews
The bystanders
They watched, tongues caught in their throats
Those who committed no crime but did not enforce the justice necessary
With their eyes down, they kept walking, and tried to forget
How can they forget?
Can you forget?
History has been written
The ink has dried
The horrors of the past etched for all to read even now
How can you forget when it is right there forever
We must never forget
Lessons must be learned
Love over hate
Stronger together
Hold this example close to your heart
Our turn to write history is now
Never forget
"Henry Pestka Entry"
Valerie G.
Grade 9
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Prose

Author Statement

The point of my project is to educate and acknowledge the people who lived and died during this time period. I started writing without planning it out just so I could get my thoughts out on paper. After that, I just made small edits to grammar without deleting any of my ideas I had put on paper. My project talks about the people who died and how we shouldn't forget about them and what they had to live through. It shows the meaning of never forget.
Henry Pestka Entry

Everyone should be able to have a lifeline if they need it. Being the lifeline could be the simplest thing, like saying a few nice words or saving someone's life in a time of need. Millions of victims worldwide never had that lifeline because of a self-centered, one-sided community. Many people don't take the time to learn or understand these victims' points of view. Or maybe they just don't believe in the same things the victims did. But that doesn’t justify letting those many victims lose the life that they could’ve lived. All of those victims had great chances to achieve their life goals, but that chance got stripped away because they chose to defend themselves and their beliefs. Heroic actions should be rewarded, right? To some, that only applies to what they think is right. But if it doesn’t hurt them specifically, why does it matter what the heroic action is? This kind of mindset hurts those people who differ from that belief and the community. During the Holocaust, millions also died for standing up for what was right. Those who helped the Jewish died, those who aided victims, or locals who spoke out died. Victims who all deserve to be remembered for the tragic casualty. Knowing victims of the holocaust, I know many of their relatives were killed during the holocaust.

For example, 27% of the Austrian population and 43% of the Belgium Jewish population also died from the Holocaust. 6 million were Jewish, and 5 million were not Jewish. Still, they also died from the Holocaust. 11 million victims all in 12 years of pure and horrendous casualties. As we are in a better place regarding social justice, there are still people who disagree with the same beliefs and get violent just to prove their point. All heroic victims of violence deserve to be remembered for being a hero for defending themselves and others. Those who support others for the sake of other people are the ones who deserve the most recognition. Selflessness is something that people nowadays lack, and it’s something that everyone should adopt to improve the community around the world further.
My poem represents groups who were targeted during the Holocaust as well as those who helped them. I saw each person as a star, creating a brighter future and inspiring people worldwide. The reason "Stars" aligns with the theme of Never Forget is because stars may explode or no longer be seen through a telescope, but they never go away. Each star has a name and each star has a story, like those who lived through or perished during the Holocaust. Stars bring light into our world like a glimmer of hope which is what thousands of people did for individuals targeted by the Nazis. I wanted my poem to be about something that is as everlasting as the impact of the Holocaust.
Within a dark abyss, there was a flicker
this flicker was faint, outnumbered by darkness
a flame lesser than that of a match, nevertheless, a flame determined to stay ablaze
Little by little, flames appeared like stars in the night sky,
providing warmth to those who were helpless against the abyss
these flames grew brighter with each person they kept warm,
transforming each into a star,
soon these stars grew into the Sun, a beacon of hope.
a constant battle between the light and dark, a battle that is still fought today,
between good and evil
between righteous and immoral.
the darkness swallowed eleven million of these stars
but we have not forgotten the lost stars, we are just no longer able to see them
even though these stars have been gone for many years, we will never forget
we will never forget the genocide
we will never forget the antisemitism
we will never forget, because if we do,
the sky with cease to possess these sparkling specs of hope
and history will be doomed to repeat itself.

Stars

Emily G.
"Stand Up"
Kylie H.
Grade 9
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

The poem is meant to convey the struggles faced by young girls in the concentration camps with extreme determination to survive. They needed to stay "healthy" inside these concentration camps actively working against them. Their health was regularly inspected, and if they were in poor health (unable to work), they would be taken away and killed. It is extremely important for young girls today, like myself, to never forget the hardships experienced by those who came before us. It gives the necessary perspective. The only way we learn to get better is by learning from our mistakes and our past.
Stand Up

Starvation and disease. Hunger and sickness.
Take a breath. But your lungs don’t fill with air. It doesn’t feel real.
Another girl didn’t wake up this morning. Her friends shake her violently but her body stays limp.
Never let them see you cry. Avoid vulnerability.
Do or die. I will not die here.

Under the control of these bullfrogs, the girls drop like flies.
Pick yourself up, although your legs may wobble. You will make it out, you just need to stand up.
My project was about the Attack of Pearl Harbor from the accounts of two real people who survived (Grace Lally and Lou Conter). They each discuss their struggles and how they'll never forget what happened that tragic day, to a group of citizens in 1960. I decided upon these people because they stuck out to me as impactful individuals when conducting my research. I chose Pearl Harbor because my great grandpa was a survivor from this event too.
Never Forget: Pearl Harbor

“Never forget. I will never forget the day that all of my friends, honestly most everyone I knew, were lost deep into the Pacific. I will never forget the way I felt the morning of December 7th 1941. Those moments will stay with me forever.” (clapping emerges passionately in the background) Grace Lally was one of the chief nurses on a hospital ship, watching the Pearl Harbor attack from afar. She is now giving a speech at a group of adults’ Pearl Harbor presentation around 1960.

“I will never forget, shortly before 8 am, I was just preparing for a normal day. While the Japanese bombed us, the nurses knew almost nothing. We were left in the dark, watching in terror.” The audience was silent as Grace continued.

“I felt an immense sense of pain as I watched all the soldiers I’d worked hard to repair die. I remember distinctly taking a deep breath thinking, this is it and that we’re all about to die, every one of us. I snapped out of it and continued my duties as best as I could. Uugh!” There were tears in Grace’s eyes and she shuddered and walked off the stage, clearly upset. The audience was stunned at this up close perspective to such a horrible event like Pearl Harbor. The next speaker approached the stage.

“Hello, my name is Lou Conter. I was on a ship on the horrible day known to you all as the bombing of Pearl Harbor. You see, I was only 22, a very young soldier, and I can still remember that moment all too clearly. *We didn’t have time to be scared. We just automatically did what we’re supposed to do and had to do and trained to do.* Looking back now, I really do see how lucky I was, still am, and ever will be, that I hadn’t died that day like so many of my dearest friends.” He continued to explain how 1,177* people had died and how he shakes every time he walks past the memorial.

“That day is engraved into my head and still affects what I do to this day.” And with that, both survivors had left the stage. The audience wasn't sure whether to clap or cry, most people did both.

As of today, Lou Cotter is still alive and over 100 years old. Grace Lally passed away in 1983. We should always acknowledge how much citizens have given up, especially at such a tragic event like the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Never forget the acts of service, the lives given, and the experiences that veterans take with them, whether in a major event, or protecting our country today.

*= excerpt from actual Lou on December 7, 2021

Works Cited


"Remember to Never Forget"
Kelly M.
Grade 9
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

My project Remember to Never Forget is about the importance of remembering. To me, my project portrays how we need to remember these hard times to make sure that they stay remembered forever. I think my poem recognizes how hard it was for people in the challenging time of WWII. The process I used when writing this poem was to sit down and write it piece by piece. Or whenever I would be hit by inspiration on what to include I would jot it down. When I had some time, I would go over what I had, write it, and piece it together so it made sense and was cohesive.

I believe my project aligns with the theme Never Forget because as I stated above I believe my poem shows and portrays the importance of remembering so we never forget. I believe that my project shows that we need to remember even if it hurts, we need to Remember even if we believe it will be better to shove it down deep and just forget. We need to remember in order to never forget.
Remember to Never Forget

Never forget
The way our eyes lost their glitter
Always regret
Forever we are bitter
When they decided to neglect
All of our screams
When we were the subject
In all of their schemes

Once we began to object
And to scream loud
They had to reject
All of our dreams of a better and brighter tomorrow
When we were proud
They claimed we were the problem
The cause of all of their pain
Why they had fallen to the bottom

We were made to fit the mold they chose
No matter how much we tried to protest
They made us the ones who posed
For their perfect picture
We were the ones whom they enclosed

They tried to contain us
They fought to the end
But we came out victorious
Even if no one felt that in the end

Now we must remember
Even though it may hurt
So now with our dying ember
We must remember
To never forget
"How the Holocaust Harmed (Never Forget)"
Anna P.
Grade 9
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

I created a poem called, How The Holocaust Harmed. The piece is about how a soldier may have felt after fighting in a battle, and how different bystanders could have acted during this tragedy. I included data which showed how the Holocaust affected everybody. I wanted to include some perspective in my work, as well as cold hard facts. I used the poetry scheme so the last word in every line of each stanza rhymes.

My project aligns with the theme because, I showed how the Holocaust caused harm and many gruesome deaths. I highlighted how it is important for us to remember this event in history because we don't want anything like it to occur again.
How the Holocaust Harmed
Never Forget

Do you remember learning about the Holocaust in school with no pride?
How many people do you think died?

Soldier dried his eyes with his arm
His team was hurt then shot with a gun
He had to stay strong as the war has just begun
Soldier limped out of the battlefield as the few survivors told him to run
Soldier tried to get back to his family, he was not done

There were millions injured and around 11 million dead
Soldiers who promised to return home never made it back to their bed
six million victims were Jewish, but just wait cause there is much more dread
five million losses were soldiers, activists, and civilians, this should get to your head

Many soldiers stumbled away in pain
Most people lost much more than they could gain
Some people showed little remorse and were vain
After this battle nothing was the same
Less than 1 percent of Michigan's population is Jewish, this is sad and only we are to blame
"The Journey to Forget"

Catherine S.
Grade 9
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

The journey to forget is the true story of my great great grandparent’s journey to a better life. When school children learn about immigrants’ voyages to the New World, they hear stories of why they came and what happened when they arrived. Eventually, though, the world seems to forget their often treacherous and always tiring trek. My great-great-grandparents, Pleuntje and Cornelius Vet, were immigrants such as these.

Together, they left their peaceful village in the Netherlands for the bustling city of New York. On the way, Pleuntje gave birth to their son, my great-grandpa, Teunis Vet, survived raging storms and cried tears of joy when they landed in Ellis Island. Despite the hardships they endured, they didn’t sit down and feel sorry for themselves. They stood up and rejoiced because they were grateful to have even made it to a land brimming with new opportunities. Through it all they had seen their journey as a blessing. Many times today we see celebrities and famous athletes of our time tell us about their accomplishments and we listen with bated breath.

Often, they never tell us about their journey to fame. Just like my great-great-great-grandparents who passed on their story through generations, I believe that journeys are more important than accomplishments. Titles, accomplishments, medals and fame will come and go. But our journey through life affects us like a giant ripple; it is what brought me here and will always be there. This is why we should never forget them.

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest
Journey

Far away as the sea they came chasing hope

Only a father and mother searching for life

Raging sea and violent storms brought a child but held and warm

Getting there finally a sense of peace enough

Enough! they wanted to shout as they were prodded and poked instead like rats in a lab
I wrote this writing piece because I want to show my views and feelings about bullying. I hope that if someone is struggling with this issue, they could relate to my writing and realize they are not alone. Throughout writing this piece, I put my experiences, and my thoughts in. I wanted to write a poem, because poems are powerful. But I also really wanted to write a story, to incorporate my memories and experiences. So I did a mix of both.

If someone was bullied in the past, it will take a long amount of time to heal. And once they have pieced themselves together again, those words and memories will always haunt them throughout their life. That is how I related this project to Never Forget. Because even years after someone has experienced bullying, they will never forget that feeling, that moment, those words. So I want to advise everyone, think before you speak, because you will never know how much those words can take a toll on others.
Never Forget

Stabbed. The gut wrenching feeling. I will never forget. That memory still haunts me 3 years later. I will never forget. The look on her face. The look on my face. I couldn't shake it. I will never forget. This moment. Right now. The same feeling but this time it was guilt, because it wasn't me. It was her.

The guilt I feel, not to take the first step. The first step is always the most difficult. Are you making the right choice? Are you benefitting the situation? Will you be helping that person in need? That look on her face. So familiar. I'm feeling upset. Guilty. My feet scuff against the pavement. Step one. Step two. I face the two individuals. One with a smug look wiped across their face. The other with that familiar face. The one I know all too well. This girl. This poor girl who now, will know this familiar feeling. I need to prevent this. She can't be another victim. My jaw drops open. Ready to face them. Words escape my mouth. Eyes turn to me. Stop. Look at yourself. I continued to stare into the cold eyes of the villain. Speaking words that I can't hear, but know might, just might, put an end to this cruel act. This is happening too much, I think to myself. Whether it's about people's appearance or religion, people are getting hurt too much. What has our generation turned into? I keep this thought in mind as I keep talking to the girls in front of me. I didn’t know who they were. Where they were from. What they were doing. But that didn’t matter. All I knew was that this girl was bullying the other. And I was not just going to walk away. I was going to make a difference.

Those girls don't know how much bullying can change someone. It can ruin someone and take excessive amounts of time to piece that person back together. Some people who have experienced bullying may not ever be pieced back together afterwards. Even if you are back to your old self, you will always have those words in your head. This is because bullying will always leave a scar. It will always haunt you throughout your life. I want these girls to understand the effects, but not experience it. So here I stand. Facing the cruel act. I won't let this happen to someone, if I can prevent it. Because I've experienced it. And I will never forget.
"Never Forget"
Farzona U.
Grade 9
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My project is about the hardship many victims of the Holocaust went through, and how they stayed hopeful during it all. My project is an acrostic poem, with the words Never Forget. My project aligns with the theme Never Forget because I talk about what millions and millions of Jews and victims went through and how we should never forget about the pain and the torture they endured.
Never Forget

N - Never forget the victims, the survivors and the perpetrators. Never forget the pain more than 11 million victims of the holocaust went through.

E - Even in the most hopeless situations, there were people that stood up and acted like true heroes. People that helped the victims and the people that always stood against the Holocaust.

V - Valuable items be thrown away. Millions of innocent people being taken away from their homes and put into labor camps, where millions of people died.

E - Even through all of this, the victims stayed hopeful. They stayed brave and courageous and never lost hope.

R - Refugees, millions and millions of Jewish refugees and victims trying to escape Germany.

F - Forced into labor camps, forced out of Germany, forced out of their homes, forced away from their basic human rights.

O - One by one, children, babies, teens, adults- families being separated and most never reuniting again.

R - Ripped away from everything they once knew, their safety being taken away just because of their beliefs. Freedom of speech/belief, something all humans deserve. Something that should never be taken away.

G - Glimmers of hope, even through the intolerable pain, there was still hope.

E - Everyday this tragic time will be remembered and never forgotten.

T - This is something that will never be forgotten, the pain, the insufferable pain more than 11 million victims and their families went through, will always be remembered. Never Forget.
My poetry project, Tragedy is based around the sickening reality of the Holocaust. There was so much hurt and sacrifice that shaped our world today. Despite the suffering of 11 million people, there was perseverance throughout. When writing this poem, I first thought of different poem styles and structures to use, as well as key ideas. I aspired to write a poem loosely based on an elegy, where there was mourning at the beginning that led to glorification of all that was sacrificed for the greater good. In addition to this planning, I also researched the Holocaust extensively, to write the most factual yet eye opening poem to my ability.

Tragedy, aligns with this years theme, Never Forget because it shows how even though so many horrific things happened during the Holocaust, there was overwhelming strength among Jewish people and allies. The Holocaust must never be forgotten because it shaped, and continues to shape our world and the humans in it.
Tragedy

The sickening paralyzation of society has torn many hearts.

Hearts that already started with scars.

Diaspora.

Detached and broken from a place known as home.  
A place where being who you were was accepted, not loathed.

Cruelty.

The human mind crawls with terror.  
How to get out when you are stranded with killers?  
Killers that imprison innocence.

Death.

Bodies upon bodies, breathing toxic air.  
But the air didn’t start that way.  
Perseverance.

Never let go of the past, thinking it's gone.

Never sit watching life go by, waiting for the right moment to stand.

That moment may never come.  
Never forget.

Never forget all that was sacrificed.

It was sacrificed for lives; lives that should have been lived.

Fionnoula W.
Author Statement

My project is about the remembering the heroes who helped during the holocaust. There were many citizens who chose to project Jews and lost their lives for it. My project aligns with the theme Never Forget because it centers around remembering those who lost their lives to ensure the past is not repeated.
Stories from the Heart

The holocaust is the ultimate display of antisemitism in history; 11 million people lost their lives during the holocaust. When remembering the holocaust it is important to remember not only the 6 million Jews that lost their lives, but also the 5 million others that lost their lives. Soldiers, Civilians, Activists, Catholics, Romans, Jehovah’s witnesses, and more were victims of the Holocaust.

One example of an activist is Karolina Juszczykowska. Karolina was born in Budkow Poland during the 1890s. She bravely chose to hide two Jews in her cellar during the holocaust. German soldiers discovered them during a raid on her home. Unfortunately, the Jews were shot immediately. Karolina was arrested and later executed. Another example of an activist is Johanna Eck. Johanna successfully hid two jews in her home for the duration of the war. One of the Jews she helped was named Heinz Guttman. Heinz’s family was deported during the war and he was left with nobody and nothing, until Johanna Eck helped him. When asked why she would do something like that Eck said, “ If a fellow human being is in distress and I can help him, then it becomes my duty and responsibility, “(Women of Valor).

It is important to note that acts of antisemitism are still happening in today’s world. The ADL, Anti- Defamation League, recorded 2717 antisemitic attacks in the United States during 2021. One alarming statistic declares that problems went up in colleges 21% in 2021, from 128 to 220 (Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2021). Clearly, the world still has work to do in order for every citizen to feel equally protected and valued.

All of this connects with one goal everyone should keep in mind; it is important that we learn history to make sure it is not repeated. If we don’t take the time to educate ourselves and the younger generations, there is nothing stopping us from making the same mistakes. A famous quote from Winston Churchill that embodies this idea, “Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”

Works Cited


Author Statements and Writing Projects

Grade 10
"Never Forget and Always Remember"

Daphna M.
Grade 10
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

During class, I had a feeling that I should at least try to write a poem or entry for the competition. My family is from Israel, we moved to Michigan when I was around a year old. My great-grandparents escaped Germany before the war and we have always valued the connection to our history and ancestry. My poem aligns with the theme Never Forget by embodying the sacrifice and hardships but also highlighting the courage and bravery that was displayed during this hard time.


Never Forget and Always Remember

Never forget the six million
Never forget the night the glass shattered
Never forget the branding that tied them to their fate
Never forget the blood that has been splattered
Never forget the civilians
The men, women, and children
That were killed by the villains
Never forget the six million

But always remember the woman who courageously held her child
Always remember the families who clung to each other
Always remember the survivors who persevered to the end
Always remember those who fled, despite leaving their family and children
Always remember the six million who fought together
Always remember the six million, forever
Author Statements
and
Writing Projects

Grade 11
Author Statement

I chose to write a poem about the struggles families and friends had while suffering in concentration camps. I wanted to incorporate how people overcame their struggles and became stronger. My poem aligns with the theme: Never Forget because I made sure to incorporate how the Nazis and Hitler ruined these people lives.
The Fellow Flock

Today we stand, sit, and talk
And dwell among our friendly flock
we greet our neighbors as we talk
Our neighbors have served and fought a lot

From Deutschland to the seven seas
We know that this has cost a lot
When I say cost, I mean a lot
You took our lives, our friends, our flock

We hurt and suffered
For months to come
To go back in time
When Jews did not
Hitler, nazis, whoever it was
You hurt our friends, and ourselves a lot
We sat, we starved, and we lost a lot
But deep inside, we gained a lot
We watched our friends get taken out

Through the glass, we've dreamed a lot
From faith to friends, our freedom comes
We will be free, soon enough
"Never Forget"
Tristan B.
Grade 11
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

My project is about the Jewish Holocaust. I wrote my piece in a poetry format. The Jewish Holocaust is one of the most devastating acts and we should never forget.
Never Forget

Having courage is critical.
It’s okay to be scared; you will overcome your fears.
Let’s talk about the people whom we honor and why bravery is important.

We will never forget the people who survived the devasting Jewish Holocaust.
If you are not much of a fighter, you have the right to hide.
Hiding is brave, too.

We will remember the people who showed bravery during the harsh time of the Holocaust.
You can’t have bravery without the feeling of being scared.
You are facing your setbacks.

Courage is important for going through scary things.
Let’s talk about the people we honor.
Who do you honor?
Author Statement

My project is about growing up facing antisemitism. As a Jewish girl growing up in predominantly Christian areas, it has been hard to feel welcomed sometimes. I have had things said to me that most people couldn't even imagine. Being Jewish is a big part of my life and just because others believe different things doesn't mean I should have to hide who I am. There are few Jewish kids in my school district, and I know all of them, and we all have faced very similar situations when it comes to antisemitism.

Some of the choices that I made to try to decide how to write the poem was trying to figure out how I wanted to show my experience with antisemitism and how it has affected my life. I decided by keeping the sentences shorter and more abrupt it made the poem more serious. I also shifted the tone of the poem from more lonely to more confident by the end. I think this helps me build on the idea that antisemitism has helped me to learn how to stand up for myself and know how to advocate for myself when needed.

My poem goes along with the theme to “Never Forget” because in order to “Never Forget” you need to be able to tell your story. It is very important for people to tell their stories especially when facing antisemitism so that people don’t forget about the awful things that have happened to Jews. From the quote by George Santayana, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”
The Jewish Girl

Walking through the halls
   Seeing I’m all alone
Nobody else feels this way,
Or knows what I have been through.

“Are you the girl that’s Jewish,”
   “You belong in hell,”
“Jews are the reason that Jesus is dead,”

And some who even say,
   “The Holocaust never happened.”

I look at them but don’t believe,
How could they say such things?

Kids think the jokes are funny,
   Even when they are not.
Saluting to those who killed six million
   Just for who they are.

Though I’m not completely alone,
   There are so few of us.
It makes it feel like it’s you,
   Versus everyone else.

Judaism isn’t just a religion,
   It is my culture.
No matter what path I decide to take
   I will always be Jewish.
"Never Forget"
Mason C.
Grade 11
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Prose

Author Statement

I wrote about Henry in a one-page paper.
As a human race, it is important for us to study our history and past events. We need to do this so that we can continue to learn from what has worked in the past but, more importantly, we need to study the negative so that we can learn from ourselves and don’t make the same mistakes again. Through the evolution of man, there have been many events that could be talked about but, something that a lot of people tend to take for granted is the Holocaust.

The Holocaust was the mass extinction of Jews, homosexuals, Gypsies, and many other groups that the Nazis felt were not fit for human life during World War II. The Germans were calling this the “final solution” for people who followed Judaism. Antisemitism was a growing ideology in Germany in the 1930s and continued to grow with the likes of Adolf Hitler. Hitler was a politician who preached hatred toward Jews and for this, he grew in power very quickly. He blamed Jews for the loss of the Great War and also developed the idea that the Jews were seeking world domination. Adolf would soon become head of a coalition government and this would lead to the boycott of Jewish business, the banning of Jews in schools, and the burning of Jewish literature. After years of this brutality, police would start taking arrested Jews to concentration camps where they would work them to death. These concentration camps continued through the war and would use these individuals as slaves to help with the war effort. They would take the hard labor jobs which included mining, factory work, and construction. Many were killed due to starvation, disease or even beating. It wasn’t until 1942 that the Nazis began sending Jews to extermination camps, the main goal of these camps was to kill as many Jews as they could, as efficiently as they could. In total this would result in around six million Jewish deaths along with five million non-Jewish individuals.

As a society, we need to be more aware of our past and its impact on our daily lives. History will eventually repeat itself if we are not careful. We must never forget the Holocaust in honor of the people that lost their lives to those inhuman acts.
Author Statement

It’s about things to never forget. I thought long and hard about my life, and historical events. In the story it says things that you should never forget.
Never Forget

Over the course of history there have been many events. Some good, some bad. All of them we must never forget. We must never forget the rights our founding fathers fought for. We must take care to remember our family stories, names of loved ones long lost to the sands of time. We must remember the braveries of the fallen, fighting the countless battles from the distant past into the far future. We never forget the atrocities of war, through the mist and gas of time we must never forget. We must never forget what our values are, who we are as a people. Be it pride as a person or as a community we must never forget. Never forget those who fought for equal rights, freedom, and those who died a martyr. We must never forget. We must never forget to be better, as a person, community, and as a whole. We must never forget those who we have met on our travels on the sea of time, though we may have met for a fleeting moment on the sea of time, they have charted a new course for us to follow. Never forget parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, great grandparents, cousins, friends, or loved ones. Never forget the small moments in life, fishing on the banks of a river with papa and catching a big one. Never forget the happy moments in life, eagerly tearing open a Nintendo DS on Christmas. Never forget love, the first kiss underneath a red Maple tree with yellow leafs dancing in the wind. Never forget the battles for the history books, the charge from trench to trench in the muddy no man’s land. Never forget the heroes that came home and never received thanks. Never forget the bitter moments in life, the somber chilling rain that came down as many grieved for lost ones. Never forget the warm moments in life, the embrace of a loved one near a campfire. Never forget the impactful moments in life, staring at the stars wondering if there is anyone out there who truly loves you. Never forget. We must never forget.
"Never Forget Speech"
Audri F.
Grade 11
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Prose

Author Statement

I chose to write a speech about how humans never forget the little things, especially in relationships.
Never Forget Speech

Never forget. Humans never forget the people. The people that have impacted their lives. Some never forget faces or voices. The majority never forget actions. We may forget a person’s exact words, but we won’t forget those specific moments. Those moments of joy. Moments of pride, courage, and those moments of connection. The pat on the back from your dad after your baseball game. The loving hug from your mom as she tucks you in. When they open the door for you. When they hold you while you cry. When they simply ask how you’re doing. When they listen to what you have to say. When they give you those eyes with that special smile. All of these things stick. They will all replay for years to come in your mind. Like a broken tape, the good moments will shine through. As human beings, we hold onto those moments.

These aren’t the only moments that we won’t forget. We also won’t forget the bad times. The time your dad yelled at you for not winning that game. When your mom sent you to your room for the night. When they give you those eyes of disapproval. That face of disappointment. We never forget these moments. The good and the bad, the yin and the yang. They work hand in hand. There will be days when the bad moments will outshine the good. There will be days when we forget about the good moments. These days take courage. Our lives are like the tide, always shifting. Never staying constant for too long. We must have courage to get through the bad days, we must push through to those good ones.

Not only must we acknowledge these moments in our own lives, but we must also ensure that we spread those good moments. It’s like a chain of kindness. In order to create an encouraging and strong community we need to provide good moments for those around us. Whether that be patting your friend on the back after a baseball game, a text goodnight or good morning, truly listening when someone needs a person to vent to or being that shoulder for them to cry on. Be the good that you want to see in your own life.
"Never Forget"
Glenn G.
Grade 11
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

I wrote this about 9/11 and how we should never forget.
Never Forget

The importance of remembering,
The soldiers, the workers, the firemen, and the lives of the passed
Tragedy struck on the 11th of September
With one plane and two towers
The incident that took many people's lives and struck our nation,
The fear, and the remembrance the people deserve,
The emotional and physical damage this terrorist attack caused,
We must remember the people who were killed and lost their lives on 9/11
The memorials on the remains of the trade centers to help
Even a statue in remembrance of the people's lives that were lost,
Won't heal all the emotional damage it caused,
We must remember the tragedy of 9/11.
"Never Forget"

Jacob K.
Grade 11
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Prose

Author Statement

My project is about how learning about people’s stories might stop people from continuing these antisemitic acts.
Never Forget

As time passes, and we move to a new age, and a better age of acceptance and understanding, it becomes more and more important to teach and learn about the Holocaust, and the oppression of the Jewish people.

Throughout history there has been antisemitism from the Catholics blaming them for Jesus’s death all the way up till the present day where Michigan has had the 5th most antisemitic incidents in the United States. The people today that do these unforgivable things are people that are uneducated on the history of the Jewish people. If people were to understand how bad it was for the Jewish people in the mid 1930’s to the late 1940’s, and were to hear the stories of how the Nazi soldiers took them from their home told them that they could only bring what they could carry, or the saddening pictures of the mass graves and the horrible conditions they were in after they were liberated, maybe people would realize what they are doing is so wrong. If they were to see the disgusting living conditions in death camps like Auschwitz where many peoples lives were cut short because of a country filled with anti semitic propaganda, maybe the people committing these hate crimes would know that they are no better than the Nazi soldiers.

To keep one’s memory alive some people put up pictures of them, but this loses value, it loses what the person lived for but telling one’s story keeps their memory and core beliefs alive, but it also helps people understand and to learn how to be accepting of other people if that be race or gender. It is important to not only tell the story of the Jewish people but it is also just as important to understand the hardship they have experienced, so when the time comes that you have the chance to tell their story you can do it correctly. Stories of other people can be easily forgotten so tell it in a way that will impact one’s life and change their thinking so it will never be forgotten.
"Justice for Holocaust Victims"
JT M.
Grade 11
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

This poem is about the horrifying events that took place in our world and tells us to never let it happen again and to learn from this.
Justice for Holocaust Victims

The holocaust, a time of pain and loss
Millions of lives, at such a great cost
We must remember, and never forget
The innocent victims, whom we should protect

Their families torn apart, with no way to cope
Lives shattered, and left with no hope
But still we carry on, their memories bright
Honoring their spirits, in the darkest of night

We vow to never let this happen again
To stand up for justice, and put an end
To the hate that caused such endless strife
And bring peace to all, for a better life

So let us learn, and share their story
Remembering the victims, in all their glory
Their courage and strength, a shining light
Inspiring us all, to do what is right.
My project describes how you should never forget the actions that a person does. Whether it is good or evil. I started this project through English and gained more interest as I learned more about what it's actually about. My project aligns with the idea Never Forget because it briefly talks about how the actions one does should never be forgotten.
There’s a common question asked among society that many have debated on. That being, “would you rather have less evil or more good?” Meaning that if you had a preference, would you rather erase majority of evil among the world, or vastly increase the amount of virtue around the world. Overall, many would rather increase the amount of positivity among society, and one of those who supported that statement was Martin Luther King Jr. One reason we should never forget MLK was because he spread these acts of positivity by motivating others through non-violent protests and numerous speeches across the country. Another reason we should never forget MLK was because of his miraculous attempts to change America’s democracy and segregation.

Firstly, MLK was very memorable through the positivity he spread throughout Black-American culture in the 20th century. His attempts weren’t only to spread positivity, but also to bring hope to many Black-Americans who had to deal with the numerous racist acts committed towards them. MLK gathered many through his famous speeches across the country as well as the many protests he led. Many supported him in his non-violent protests in attempt to change segregation and racism throughout the country. One famous speech that many still consistently speak of was his, “I Have A Dream” speech. In this speech he outlines the long history of racial prejudice and discrimination to Black-Americans across the United States as well as attempting to convince others of how America itself was to be held accountable for not keeping the promise given to its citizens. That promise being the 14th Amendment that states, “Every human being has the right to life, liberty and the security of his person. Right to life, liberty and personal security. Article II. All persons are equal before the law and have the rights and duties established in this Declaration, without distinction as to race, sex, language, creed or any other factor.” This states that indeed every human should be treated equally no matter the race or sex therefor supporting his point. This speech was a crucial changing point in the civil rights movement.

Another reason why Martin Luther King Jr. should never be forgotten was because of his miraculous attempts to change democracy and segregation across America. No matter how much discrimination he went through he never stopped pursuing his true dream of accomplishing the abolishment of racial discrimination. His commitment to the movement motivated others and gave others the hope to believe that one day things will change.

Overall, MLK influenced many people throughout his lifetime and ultimately achieved his goals. Without his protests or motivation of society we may not have seen the same outcome and live in the same world today. Therefore, we should never forget MLK because he spread these acts of positivity by motivating others through non-violent protests and numerous speeches across the country. Also, his miraculous attempts to change America’s democracy and segregation.
Author Statement

My project is about the human race's past and how it is good to never forget what it consists of, no matter if it's bad or good. I used a normal process where I found evidence that supported my claim and wrote from there. My project aligns with the theme Never Forget by explaining how people can learn from their history and prevent some of the mistakes that had been made before.
History is marked by our past and has helped influence the world today, it is best that we remember every moment throughout history. Even if these moments consist of tragedy it is best to keep them talked about in order to prevent these tragedies from repeating themselves. In every story there is a hero and a villain, each are just as significant to the story as the other. Without a hero and a villain there wouldn’t be a positive or negative side to the story, causing it to lose its significance. History works just like stories do, we use the negative parts of our past to learn from them, and the positive to find the good out of the negatives.

Racism is a major factor in our history, it has played a large role and is sadly still around today. Martin Luther King was a very positive part of racism, he had one of the largest voices throughout the black community. He was arguably the biggest black activist at the time and had a huge impact on ending racism. In this story we have the negative which was racism and the positive which consists of heroes like Martin Luther King. Racism is just one of the many examples of why we should never forget our history because there are many important things we can take away from it, which can also have a positive impact on a person's life.

Without history we wouldn't be able to understand the way of life and our past. With the advancement in technology it is almost impossible for history to be forgotten. Once something is submitted to the internet it is there forever, unlike a piece of writing which can easily be lost. Our history should not be taken for granted and should be studied throughout school systems, it is best to educate someone about our history early in their life so they can understand the wrongdoing that has been done in the past. This can help increase the positive sides in life and help make the world a better place. Preventing more negative outcomes and painting a better future for humanity.
"Ropes of Memory"
Locust S.
Grade 11
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

This is an elongated poem I wrote regarding my own experience with the struggles of mental health and the challenge that is getting out of bad mental spaces. My poem aligns with the theme by talking about never being able to forget the broad strokes and yet not being able to remember the details.
Ropes of Memory

It was a certain kind of desolation
A withering mass whose snarl directed at us for
Decades finally chose to bite
We put up walls of amnesia
But we don’t truly forget
How can we
When we stepped foot on that road
We never truly got off
All the footprints follow you
The shadows of the trees don’t leave you even when
You are in a meadow
It’s silly I sit here rambling about memories
Yet I can’t remember their faces
"Never Forgetting"
Owen T.
Grade 11
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

I decided on a poem as it fit this best in my opinion.
Never Forgetting

Never forget where you came from
Where you came from is your past
But it's what makes you last
If you lose touch of what made you, you
You could even lose your future
If you lose sense of what you have
It could ruin what you currently have
Your past is what makes your future
Your family, friends, struggles, and story
Are most important in your past
Do not forget your past or it will your last
Never forget where you came from
Never forget your past
Never forget your future
Never forget your struggles
Never forget your family
Never forget your friends
Author Statement

My project is about those who were affected by the Holocaust in a negative way. While creating the process I used a process to create a list of ways in which one is able to honor those affected to ensure that they are never forgotten throughout history. My project aligns with the theme because it discusses the role that those treated poorly play in our world's history. It also provides examples for how to show one's honor towards those affected.
Never Forget

In 1933, a horrific time in our Earth's history occurred known as the Holocaust. The Holocaust was the assassination of many people in many walks of life by German forces known as Nazis. Those harshly treated and affected during this time period should never be forgotten, for the role they play in history is of great importance to our world today.

By honoring not only those who were killed, but everyone else that fought an unfair battle, we as a society are able to show our undeniable sake that an event like such will never happen again. The people lost in this event were taken from their families, the Earth, and anything positive they had to offer to it. An event like such would be a major setback for our society, as the changes within the past hundred years, in terms of social equality, would almost be invisible. For this reason, the amount of importance that should be considered when speaking of this topic is great. We as a society need to ensure that we use this event to learn from our past mistakes as a global culture and create a positive future moving forward. One of the most impactful ways in which this can be done is by showing a sense of remembrance for those who witnessed the Holocaust and how it changed many lives at the time and changed many families forever. There are numerous ways in which remembrance can be practiced.

Some of the ways to practice remembrance consist of visiting memorial sites or doing one's best to learn as much information from the time period as possible. Not only does practicing remembrance for those severely affected in the Holocaust show one's respect for a much smaller group of people or individuals, but it shows their respect to the whole community of people who are connected to the event. The group of people affected can be seen as a large population of the world. Anyone who has known, or knows, someone closely related to the topic will be able to have a great amount of appreciation for someone supporting and remembering the event towards those affected. This type of appreciation will only continue to strike a positive influence of connection between people in communities across the globe.
Author Statements and Writing Projects

Grade 12
"Women in Society"
Allison A.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My project talks about modern struggle of women trying to be treated with equality.
Women in Society

Women in today's society
Not fast enough
Not strong enough
Not smart enough
Many things have gotten better
But there is still so far to go
We step on eggshells
Not to shatter the man ego
Run as fast as we can
To stick with a walking man
Beg for respect
Just to accept the minimum
When will they learn respect
It's not a competition
But a collaboration between us all
To not divide amongst us
Will make us the most strong
"Never Forget"
Ava B.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

I did my best to convey the message of strength and courage that so many people at the time of the Holocaust went through. The strength of those who were sent to the camps, the strength of those who identified with one of the groups being maliciously pursued, the strength of those around who offered their help, and the strength of those who tried to escape the injustice they were subjected to.

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest
Never Forget

Never forget the way our neighbors didn't care
   As they loaded us up,
   And they only stopped and stared;
The way strangers looked on with a somber eye,
Some making plans to defend a most _ ally.

Never forget the light whisperings outside the boxcar
   As the doors slowly creaked open,
   As we detect voices as guiding as the north star;
The euphonious song of benevolent instructors,
Baking melodious shelter from the destructors.

Never forget the safe silence
   As fresh meals were made,
   And the smell of gunpowder beginning the violence
The smell of sweat and terror as they lead us down,
Straight into the smell of the dead from our hometown.

Never forget when the church bells sang
   As they let us all free,
   And freedom finally rang;
The feeling of finally reaching the street,
Only to meet the graves of those who aided our fleet.

Never forget what we went through
   As terrible as it may be,
   And those who aided us when we didn't have a clue;
Never forget, never forget, no we can't ever forget.
"Never Forget"
Skylar B.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

This poem was inspired by the tragic events of the Holocaust and it encourages people to remember the event so that people will not make the same mistakes again. I hope that when people read this they think about how they can help others even if their actions seem insignificant. By speaking up when you see an injustice, making a habit of being nice and inclusive to all people, and educating yourself about the past, you can make a difference in your community every day.
Never Forget

Never forget,
Thousands of Jewish people were brutally killed in concentration camps.
Never forget,
The 11 million victims of the Holocaust.
Never forget,
Small actions can go a long way;
The people who housed Jewish people in order to protect them,
Jewish people looking out for other people in the concentration camps,
People who were vocal about the evil treatment of Jewish people.
Never forget,
The people who lived and survived.
Never forget,
That it is never too late to stand up and make a change
even if the change is small.
Never forget,
The actions of trailblazers to make the world a better place;
MLK, Malala, Gandhi, Schindler
Never forget,
So history does not repeat itself.
My poetry project is about the symbol and the meaning of holocaust in our days. I tried to apply my ideas and my experience to historical contents. The poetry in particular focuses on our days life and what we really do not to forget.
Never Forget

Never forget
These are the two words that every year
People keep sharing with each other on the 27th of January
But what do they really mean with it?
Are we really trying not to forget
Or are we doing exactly what happened in the 1940s?
And if it is true that the history is cyclical
It is also true that men will never learn from their mistakes.
If we talk about the Holocaust we usually just refer to Jewish people
But they were not the only minority that suffered.
All the others: Arabs, Black People and LGBTQ+'s members
Are those who are still usually discriminated against today.
So when we talk about remembering and not forgetting those who suffered
We should also keep attention that what happened will never happen again.
"Things We Never Forget"
Grace C.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

This poem is about the things we never forget about a person. I wanted this work to be able to apply to everyone who read it. I started off by writing the things I never forget about a person, and I ran with it.
Things We Never Forget

Laughter
Sweet sounding, Earth pounding
Day-making, heart breaking
Always accountable, now gone for good

Smile
Once shining, now resigning
“Take care, I’ll always be there”
Future promise, not broken, not honest

Voice
Booming, now never resuming
Cheery, without it, dreary
Consoled me whenever I need

Face
Distinct, keeping us linked
Blow a kiss, you will be missed
Can never tell which is last

What was once there is now gone
What once was always there, is there no more
We must move on with our own,
And always remember theirs
Never regret not knowing them.
Never forget what it was to know them.
"Remembering"
Sylvie D.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

The poem is about how it's difficult to remember the things that aren't always present in our day-to-day life, but that it's necessary to remember, for the sake of the families that lost loved ones and have continued to struggle.
Remembering

It is easy to remember
the entities that are ever-present
such as the sun, and the sky.
It is easy to forget
those that are not ever-present,
such as the mass graves
covered now
with wildflowers
and tall grasses.
It is easy to forget the
lives lost
and the grief that ensued.

Most need reminders
so as not to forget these
tragedies.
I tend to forget
the courage that
came from horror.
I tend to forget
the souls
encased in those wildflowers
and alive in those tall grasses
but when I remember them
I think of lives lived,
people thriving
and the sun shining
in the sky
"Façade of the Five Rings"
Robert D.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

While literature, photography and cinema may immortalize the 1936 Olympics as a victory for the US and the time when Jesse Owens embarrassed Hitler, it was also a great victory for Nazi Germany. Not only did Germany win the games, they also were able to present themselves as a well developed and kind nation with means to put on a spectacular show for the viewers of the Olympic games. This poem sheds light on the curtain or facade that was put up by Nazi Germany, and how people believed it. It also mentions how the US and other countries, in fact, sat their Jewish competitors for the satisfaction of the openly antisemitic host. Jesse Owens’ story is amazing, but these Olympic games were certainly no victory for the US or the rest of the world. We cannot sugarcoat such a dark era, never forget.
Façade of the Five Rings

100,000 arms outstretched, palms facing down
  Bright lights before red skies
  Illuminate false idols
  To drown the hate behind their eyes

Five rings hold up the curtain, the sturdy facade
  Ladies, Gentlemen, behold!
  Sing, dance, drink, rejoice
  The Aryans stack and cling to their gold

The tumult ensues, thick with distraction
  The snake molts his skin
  Mustache intact, he grins
  And waves, dressed in a sinister smile

From the floor shines another smile, on a brown face
  His stride so sure, his presence known
  Cries around disregard him
  Till he’s off, a league of his own, to the finish

From the pedestal, he remains the audience
  As the curtain falls for a beat
  And the grandeur of the Aryan
  Sinks in defeat at the hands of the “impure”

While we celebrate that brilliant race
  Our Jewish athletes sit and wait
  As not to frustrate our host
  The lights are bright, but the hate shines most

Never Forget
"What She Remembered Most"
Caroline F.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My project was completed to demonstrate the feelings of betrayal and sadness that someone in the Holocaust could have felt. Not only those who demonstrated hatred but also those who were passive bystanders contributed to the tragedy. I simply wanted to tell a story through the short poem.
What She Remembered Most

When she thought back
To that grim day,
Their eyes
Were what she remembered most.

The palpable hate in their eyes
As their strong grip
Dragged her away
From everything she knew

Still she stood strong.
Their hate would not rob her
Of her solitude
And her pride.

But the eyes of onlookers
That whispered an “I’m sorry”
Though could not muster the courage
To save her

This is what broke her down.
How could they stand
While such injustice
Plagued their own streets?

This is what she remembered most.
Fearful silence
If they wouldn’t save her then
How could she ever trust again?
"Threads"
Laura F.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My project remembers the clothes that many Jews wore in concentration camps. I made choices to use repetition and single-line sentences to stress the importance of the issue and to evoke emotion in the reader. I chose to write about threads, as these are artifacts that are able to be preserved for hundreds of years, and those who visit museums today are still able to view them with sympathy, remembering to "never forget."
Threads

Some threads last hundreds of years.
The blue and grey threads
From striped pajamas.
The threads from an identification number
Stitched across the stripes
To the left of brown buttons.
To the system, they were just a number.
But, in museums across the world,
intricate threads from these “numbers” are preserved.
These blue or grey threads make their stitch every day,
As we remember those who wore them.
It evokes emotion.
Summon sadness.
Prompts stories.
Sparks empathy.
These stitches reflect pain, suffering, and horror.
Perhaps this same thread that touched an innocent Jew in Auschwitz
Could spark a conversation.
Threads like these are what tie us all together.
We are all human.
"Never Forget"
Ava G.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My project covers the history of oppression against women. I researched some of the key events in the women's rights movement throughout history and used them to construct my poem. My project aligns with the theme Never Forget because even though our society is in a much better place today than we were 100 years ago it is important to remember the history of oppression women faced.
Never Forget

A history of oppression, a history of milestones

We forget the first woman's rights convention: Seneca Falls Convention
We forget the first woman to graduate from medical school: Elizabeth Blackwell
We forget the legislature of Wyoming passing America’s first suffrage law
We forget the opening of the first birth control clinic in the United States
We forget the first woman elected to congress: Jeannette Rankin
Yet, we never forget the ratification of the 19th amendment into the Constitution

The history of our ancestors paved the way for women

We must NEVER forget the moments of the past that pushed us to never settle
"Change"
Elizabeth G.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

This poem highlights the stark contrast between the view of the Jewish community in today’s world and one-hundred years ago. Although, with each day the Holocaust grows further into the past, the damage can never be undone nor forgotten. My poem “Change” aligns with the theme: Never Forget as it explains how important it is to look back on this time in history.
Change

Mazel Tov!
The celebration of the initiation ceremony of a Jewish child
A Bar Mitzvah
Unity of family and friends
Happiness, Harmony, History

Early 1900s
Hatred, Horror, Hell
Antisemitism broadcasted onto the World Wide Stage
Prejudiced Leaders

Families torn apart
Genocide
Hitler’s Reign of Terror
Ghettoization and Liquidation

A time like no other
A time in the past
A time that must never be repeated
A time that will always be remembered
A time that must never be forgotten
"Dear Grandma ..."
Emma H.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

This poem is about family heirlooms and them being passed on from generation to generation. Heirlooms are a nice thought and they mean a lot, but they will never make up for knowing the true person and having their memory.
Dear Grandma ...  

My mom hands me a necklace  
She tells me “never forget”  

It was yours,  
Then my moms  
And now mine, I guess  
Apparently it “means a lot”  

But I will never know how true that statement really is  

I have heard stories, of course,  
You were a strong women for your time;  
You fought for what you wanted  
You survived a world war  

But I will truly never know what you went through  
I will never know how you fought  
I will never know what you survived  

But now I have your locket  
So I will “never forget”
"The Helping Village"
Jack H.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Prose

Author Statement

This project is about the village of Le Chambon which stepped up to help save many Jewish people from Nazis. I wanted to find a story that I hadn't heard before and this story resonated with me. The fact that a group with a different background stepped up to help the Jewish people was really amazing to me.
The Helping Village

The Holocaust was filled with horrors that are hard to even imagine today. In such a frightening time, one village saw an opportunity. The opportunity was to stand up in the face of injustice and be brave. Le Chambon was a village in the South of France that did just that.

Located about 75 miles south of Lyon, Le Chambon was predominantly a protestant village. Over the course of World War 2, the villagers of La Chambon provided refuge to roughly 3,500 Jews fleeing the Nazis. Le Chambon is an example of seeing past differences and doing the right thing.

The people of Le Chambon put aside their difference in beliefs and did what they felt was right. They didn’t turn away from the Jews and worry about their own safety, they took a risk and in turn, saved potentially thousands of lives.

The bravery shown by the villagers of Le Chambon teaches a lesson to everyone about how taking a risk for the common good can pay off. Having the courage to stand up for others can be difficult, but Le Chambon has shown how heroic bravery can be.

In today’s world, there are several groups that face oppression. Whether or not you’re facing the same oppression as another group, when there is injustice, it’s important to do whatever you can to help.

The villagers of Le Chambon showed this by the different roles that they took. For some, making a difference meant taking in fleeing Jews and hiding them. For others it meant making sure they were integrated into the community so that tourists wouldn’t be suspicious. Others just stayed quiet to protect the Jews. All of these roles were important to their cause and helped save lives.

Similar roles can be stepped into today. Whether it is racism, antisemitism, or any other kind of hate, there are roles to be filled for everyone. Some roles may seem bigger than others, but every role makes a difference. The more people that step into a role, the bigger the change and the faster the change will happen.
"Truthful"
Hannah H.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My project is about the umbrella of fitting in. I wanted to highlight the feeling of being left to find things out for yourself. It was important to me that I included lots of emotional feelings in this poem to create a knowing environment. I think that this project aligns with the theme Never Forget, by highlighting the feelings that people won't ever forget. They will never forget feeling sad, worried, or scared.
Truthful

The concept of thoughts can form a new light in your mind.
But when that new thought is shielded by struggles
no one but yourself can understand.
Truthfully things can seem really nice, but they truly are not.
The idea is that someone is judged based on how they look, feel, love, and believe.
Is one horror movie.
We judge monsters on how they look, feel, love, and believe...
These monsters were the ones judging. Not the ones being judged.
We can't forget that someone, somewhere has been affected by different things.
Different lifestyles, different food, and different lives.
There is no particular way to live life.
There is always a thought in someone's mind that they may be different.
But we can't forget that different lives,
Are ok to exist.
They are simply a light that can only contribute to a wider picture.
Where everyone is accepted, as is.
"Never Forget"
Reiley H.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My poem is about the affects of redlining on our society and the way it affects opportunities people are giving for schooling, health care, etc. I examined the events in our history that has led to the affects of redlining. My project aligns with the theme because we can not forget the effects of our past events in our current world.
Never Forget

Red lines
Drawn intentionally onto the maps of the United States
To force ethnic and racial minorities away
Into neighborhoods where opportunities don’t stay
Emerged in the 1930s as a result of the Great Depression
This practice was banned but the bitter truth is that the effects were never forgotten

Segregation and discrimination escalated
People of color were deemed unfit
Because they were too “hazardous” to invest in the white picket fences
A justification built on fear and lies
Impacting the access to equal opportunities
The effects of injustice still remain

Redlining was forgotten as it was thought of as a thing of the past
Segregation is no longer in sight, people think
Slavery has been banned and civil rights has been won
Progress has been made in the ongoing fight but the scars never faded

Effects of redlining linger
People of color pushed to metropolitan cities while white populations thrive in safer and progressing communities
The divide has decided the education people receive, access to health care, and income disparities
A battle that extends to this very day
And will never go away
Until all have equal access to thrive and the impact is no longer alive
"Fever Forget"
Molly I.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

I wrote a poem about a child having to move to America. She doesn't feel accepted because her previous culture was so different.
Fever Forget

I’m alone
I feel all alone
I have no friends
A new house
A new neighborhood
A new country
I don’t feel welcome
The struggles to fit in, the judgment from my own culture
No one wants to sit with me
I sit alone watching the time go by
I miss the food I ate at home
I can’t understand anything
It is all so different
I am mad
I am sad
I am angry at my dad for his new job has ruined me
I hope someday I will fit in
I think of my old memories, I miss my friends
I miss my old house
I miss my old neighborhood
I miss my old country
Change can be good
But this change feels bad
I will try to redeem myself
Author Statement

Never Forget is a poem about the Holocaust. This poem was created to evoke emotion through words. I wanted to write a poem that was very realistic to what really happened. I used certain rhymes and words to transition smoothly into sensitive lines. After recent lessons taught in my IB History of The Americas HL class, I came up with this poem to show that the Holocaust should never be forgotten.
Never Forget

In fields of ash and smoky haze,
Lies memories of bitter days.
A time of horror, a time of pain
The Holocaust, a stain on history's reign.

Amidst the smoke and ash and tears,
A nation's sorrows and fears,
A crime beyond all measure done,
The Holocaust, a war on one.

The screams of the innocent echo in time,
The tears of the survivors, forever to chime.
Families torn apart, children left alone,
All suffered in a war, not of their own.

The trains that rolled at a steady pace,
Transported innocent souls to a final place,
But out of the darkness comes a glimmer of hope,
The memory of the victims will help us learn to cope.

The screams of pain, the cries of grief,
Echoes of horror beyond belief,
The innocent, the young, the old,
All victims, as the story's told.

We remember, and we mourn,
The six million lives, forever gone.
The smoke from the chimneys, a haunting sight,
A reminder of the lives lost in the darkest night.

Let us remember, never forget,
The six million Jews who met,
A fate so cruel, a crime so vile,
The Holocaust a wound that's still.

The Holocaust, a tragedy.
But also a call to humanity, never forget.
"The Streets We Want to Walk Free"
Lillian K.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

In my poem it describes the never forgotten stories and actions that Black Americans had to make in order to reach freedom. Through this process to create the project I read and researched the feelings that Black Americans felt during the Civil Rights period. The theme never forget was explained through the gratefulness that we have for those who fought for equality and freedom.
The Streets We Want to Walk Free

They walked to grasp freedom
Beatings, bruising and murder was around the corner
The tunnel of violence was a never ending mass
When will we overcome?
There stands a man holding the hand of another
Hand in hand they walk trying to find the end
In the air the words appear, we shall overcome.

Cries ring and chantings begin
The unison of feet echo through the city streets
Will we be able to reach equality?
The crowds are piled hands locked together
We will never forget those who fought
Our equality today rises from those who fell
Remembering the voices, faces and actions is key
Please never forget.
"Never Forget"
Brady L.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

**Author Statement**

My project is about the holocaust and how people and soldiers helped to save and help those in need. In times of need we need to stand up and help each other as a community and I chose to right about that because I feel it is very important in today’s time and the past to have a sense of community and safety with others.
Never Forget

The unwanteds threatened into hiding
War comes and they must go
Stock up and hibernate for their lives are in danger,
And so is their legacy and dreams.
Word is spread and the comfortable show their true colors
One by one
Little by little
Less and less supporters show their defense.
But one by one
Little by little
More and more companions shine light
Inside their homes come the unwanteds
And inside their lives come the danger
But also does the overwhelming emotions for helping out those in need
The supporters
The friends
The hidden saviors are those who will change history
Those who will continue to fuel the fire against the villains
Those who will make the change
As long as they keep on helping and fighting
"Memories"
Anna L.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My project is about remembering the holocaust and aligns with the theme of never forgetting.
Memories

The burning memories
The blood and destruction
The chaos and devastation
The torture and pain

Although so long ago
The loss is still felt today
With each generation to come
More tears are shed
More heartache is felt

We must mourn forever
And forever remember
The lives destroyed
The 6 million people
6 million souls
Because forgetting would be the greatest tragedy

And although remembering is the hardest to do
Without tears and pain
How can we become better?
"Brothers and Sisters"
Estelle M.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My project is a poem about children and their parents lost to the Holocaust. It honors innocent children lost to evil that may have otherwise been forgotten. I used repetition in my poem to hone in on the idea that the children lost in the Holocaust could have been our brothers and sisters in another lifetime. It aligns with the contest's theme of Never Forget because we should never forget those lost in the Holocaust.
Brothers and Sisters

Brothers and Sisters
Lost but never forgotten
Little brown-haired girls
And brown-eyed boys
Innocent souls
Lost to hatred and wickedness
Mothers and fathers
Aunts and uncles
People who loved and lived
Thrived and provided
Cultivated joy and harbored warmth
Those who wanted to change the world
challenge complicity
Lost to the antonym of love
Hate, sin, hatred
Never forget the lost
But also never forget the evil
Those who strived to destroy our beloved
Mothers and fathers
Aunts and uncles
Brothers and sisters
And never let evil repeat itself
So that the brothers and sisters of today
Can live in a world where they are loved
Respected, cared for, accepted
And never forgotten
"A New Beginning"
Kathryn M.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

I conveyed a poem to shine light on the opportunity to bring about new change to encourage a future that remains at peace.

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest
A New Beginning

78 years go by and the world moves swift like race cars beaming past each other
   The ghosts of the past linger in the darkness
   People ignore the horror that once was
   and live on with little remembrance
Yet those who lived it breathed it and witnessed it
   are scarred in their hearts to this day
   The time is now
Those who are embedded with that memory forever
   and their kin to bare witness their struggle longs on
Bring love and honor for those who crave a change
It takes just one courageous soul to jump out of norm
   To provoke chaos
To jumpstart honor and remembrance and change
   For the future ahead can start today
"Never Forget"
Jane M.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My poem is about the terror of the Holocaust and the importance of remembering the lives that were lost.
Never Forget

The pain still lingers
From a time full of oppression
At one man we can point our fingers
He was filled with aggression

Thought jews were impure
Tried to get rid of them all
Hard to find a cure
Watched them sprawl

Only few were willing to help
Housed them upstairs
When the jews came they didn’t yelp
Differences highlighted, they did not care

6 million were exterminated
Families torn apart
Because they were hated
You can feel it in your heart

We thank those who housed jews
And to those who were seen as a threat
This isn’t something to excuse
"Remembering the Life"
Stav O.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

This poem is an illustration of those who experienced the hate in the Holocaust. My intentions were to represent the inequality and pain so many individuals suffered, yet the remaining hope they had within them for peace.
Remembering the Life

A human heart forever bear
But wrapping arm will cause a stare

In times of these we must repair
The broken souls with open tears

And he and she standing there
With knowledge of this life unfair.

Remembering the life deprived of love
And the childhood only dreamed of above

The body worn as a rugged glove
Neglected and concealed as to be shoved

With hopes of freedom, a soring dove
But a world of hate cannot be of

And able to forgive, but never forget
A changing mind is first to be set.
"Black and White"
Anna O.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

This poem works to uncover hypocrisy within the school system, and the impact is had on students.

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest
Black and White

I walk through the halls
Waves of white
One after another, moldable

Teachers
Demanding understanding
But who better to wash in reason
Than those whose education began from birth?
Those who are constantly quizzed and reminded of the realities

Turn your head
Back to the hand that mocked and the heart that feeds
Put thoughts into action

Slowly, one heart initiates a second wave
A wave of black alongside white
A place where the kids look to the grown
And feel proud to say
Hero

Cheers to the new, bold, and valiant
Providing examples for ever after, here in now

Anna O.
This poem is a vague description of how ones life can be influenced by an outside force. Your life can become changed and warped by just one person or one event.

I used different applications of how my life has been changed and how I have read books where everyone's life is changed.

People may be influenced and then their lives change. They can never forget about what happened. It will always be there.
**Constant**

Pressure is pushed  
You are pulled  
The sky looks grayer due  
To the tint in your eyes  
Your mind fogs over  
As the fumes fill your lungs  
The fire burns inside your body  
You sit and wait for the  
Car to come  
The pressure is still continuing

They stands outside  
Knocking  
Lurking  
Waiting for the door to open  
You sit inside  
Drifting off  
Put the candle out  
Don’t let anyone see

They creep along the seams  
Still pushing  
You still pulled  
It doesn’t stop  
Constant  
Looking back  
This entity is still there  
This wandering  
This pushing  
This pulling  
It tears you apart
"What is Left Behind"
Margaret P.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My project acknowledges the past of how they were taken from their homes, everything left behind, given no hope, and no chance to overcome the events fueled by hatred against them on their own. It also highlights the present and how they still haven't necessarily been fully restored as a group and in society as, "the Phoenix that is still buried underneath." It then also explores the rebuilding process and how they must be supported in order to regrow and heal. My project aligns with the theme: Never Forget, because it explores the past and present meaning we cannot forget the struggles and brutal past and also cannot forget the present and the struggles they still face.

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest
What is Left Behind

A house cannot stand
Without a foundation
Without support

When it collapses
All is ash
And barren land

And a Phoenix cannot rise from the ashes
If it is given no wings
Nor hope

All remains
are ruins

The windows
Shards and pieces with no place

The bowl
That can no longer hold

The stuffed bunny
Missing more than just a soul

The supper once steaming
Splattered across the soil

A simple seed of a sapling
Spreads its roots among the glass, the bowls, the stuffed bunnies, the spoiled suppers

Beginning to branch out
Grasping the past
to
never forget
The whole house that once stood
Or the Phoenix that is still buried underneath.
"How Much More History?"
Elijah R.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My project is centered around the quote, "Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it." It questions the validity, and asks "how much more history must we learn before we stop repeating?" I decided to write in poetry because the shorter lines coincided well with how I wanted to write. It aligns with Never Forget as a theme because of how the quote I chose interacts with tragic history.
How Much More History?

“Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”
How much more history must we learn from?
After years upon years of tragedy after tragedy
Where is the breaking point?
Which event will it be that finally convinces people?
“That’s it, this is the last time”
“We can’t let this happen anymore”
Empty words, meaningless promises and false reassurances.
Who is it that is failing to learn from history anyways?
I couldn’t point a particular individual out on the street.
Is the problem in our teaching?
What have we not studied?
World Wars, terrorist attacks, genocides,
All in the curriculum.
Perhaps the problem is the learners.
Are they not learning as they should?
Even without rapt attention, any student will know these histories.
In the end,
What more will it take?
Author Statement

I titled this poem after a girl I chose to remember from the Holocaust for my Bat-Mitzvah 5 years ago, Zlata Ajzenberg who was killed when she was 2 years old. For me, “Never Forget” means that all children get to grow up and not have their lives taken away before they have even begun. I showcased this in the poem, particularly in the beginning between switching from a present day child’s experience to an experience children faced during the Holocaust. Children can laugh and play without worry now because of the effort the world has put into preventing another Holocaust.

However, I think there is still a lot of work left to do which I portrayed in my last verse. When people start to gloss over the terrible horrors they forget how important it is to discriminate against others because it can lead to the horrible acts committed. The Holocaust was less than a century ago and discrimination still fills our lives with increased antisemitism in the news in recent months to discriminations against sexuality and races. The purpose of my last line in the poem is to show that forgetting the Holocaust will lead to another one as it started with small discriminations against Jews.

In my second verse, I meant to show ways that people can remember so they never forget. Every year, when my family celebrates Passover we include a fifth child, the child of the Holocaust who doesn’t get to ask questions so we ask why they can’t. I also mentioned the paperclip memorial created by students because I think it shows the practice of never forgetting by showing just how many lives were lost to hatred. Overall, I wanted my poem to show that “Never Forget” has helped but practicing it must continue to prevent the next horror as the growing hatred in the world has been filling the news.

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest
Zlata Ajzenberg Z"l

Children laugh and play on the streets
The screaming and crying of the children repeats
Children go to school with all their friends
They are sent to death as their role in society ends
Children raised by loving mothers, fathers, and siblings
Weeping fills the air as families are added to the days’ killings
Children age blowing out candles on their birthday cake
Futures were robbed, the kids can no longer partake

Passover a holiday of fours meaning four kids ask why
A fifth is added for us to ask why they can’t be here today
Memorials they established with 6 million paper clips
As there are names who were lost from the scripts

How to remember something people seem to forget
Burning flesh from camps that brought regret
Now seems to say that all debts are paid
But that is not what the survivors conveyed
The horrors they have lived with stuck in their mind
Must be shared to others as a remind
That one must remember the screams
So others can follow their dreams
Without fear that another genocide lies around the bend
As the lesson is learned all humans are equal in the end
And life should be practiced as such
For small discriminations now, could lead to as much
"Join Together in Song"
Emma S.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My project is about my experience in my temple, ranging from when I was very young, to present day. Initially, I wrote this poem through a stream of consciousness style of writing, which I then refined into a final draft. My poem aligns with the theme of never forget because my poem brings up the idea that through singing with my congregation on the sabbath, I am able to remember and feel connected to my ancestors, and the people who experienced the horrors of the holocaust.
Join Together in Song

When I was young,
Going to synagogue was something I didn’t really enjoy.
Though I was handed a prayer book, it did not hold my attention.

I would look at the mural on the wall,
With its golden sparkly swirls, depicting an abstract tree of life.
I always thought it looked more like a boat.

I would listen to our cantor and congregation sing, but I was hesitant to sing along.
But even though I didn’t sing,
the melodies would always be stuck in my head on the drive home.

These songs I heard in our sanctuary,
though I disregarded them,
Now hold a special place in my heart.
Now, I am aware of things I did not know then.
I know of my people’s suffering in the Shoah.
I realized that by taking these songs for granted, I was not honoring those who suffered,
Those who were forbidden and prosecuted for their devoutness.

I now acknowledge the beauty of these songs, these prayers,
How they connect me to my fellow members of my congregation,
And connect me to my ancestors
When we sing them together.

There is power in our joined song, in our worship.
And when my Rabbi says to us, “We must never forget the Horrors of the Holocaust,”
Together, we say, Amen.
"Lost Sons"
Kase V.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My project is about veterans' mental health and how people today take their sacrifices for granted.
Lost Sons

Our heroes return to home soil
After months of blood, war and toil
But how shall the soliders adjust
From seeing their friends rot to dust
People forget the life forgone.

Ex-heroes line the streets, struggling
Street goers pass, mumbling,
Who is to take these poor men in
To heal the damaged mind within.

No one knows except the troops,
How low the both sides may stoop,
Leaving soldiers to cope
On their own.

As we go on thoroughout our life
Help our heros through their strife
They deserve more than what we give them,
Cast out on the street, homeless.

They sacrifice their bodies through their fight,
And we neglect their mental fight
Never forget what they have done
And remember the lost sons.
"Never Forget"
Kirby V.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My Poem is about how as Humans we want to be seen showing compassion and remembrance for others but many times we don’t really care. We must never forget those who were lost in the past even if they were not ours who were lost.
Never Forget

Monuments and Memorials stand abandoned
Collecting dust and loved ones teardrops
Relics of past grief
Until they stand for your grief

Horrors of the past taught to all
Unless those horrors were committed on home soil
We must teach our history to keep it from repeating
Maybe well stop the cycle next time

Pray for the victims of violence
Because what if it was your child
Until the cameras turn away
Then we can go back to work

Broken hearts and severed families across the globe
Hopefully you aren’t close enough to hear them
Never Forget
Until you keep scrolling
"Never Forget"
Lillian W.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

The poem I composed touches on the aspect of a woman's expected poise and her previous lack of a right to vote. I decided to write about this topic because the unjust expectations women have faced did and do not have just compensation. We cannot forget what women have gone through to acquire the ability to vote.

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest
Never Forget

Say please and thank you,
Use your manners.

Napkin in your lap,
With a gracious sentiment,
Is this a trap?

Turn these questions into banners.
Display your own view.
Be the exception,
Through and through.

Promote your right,
Advocate for change.
Despite the fight,
Or being called “deranged”.

Never forget
We were lacking a vote.
Never forget
We were backing a mote.

Expectations of our sex
Turned into a complex of effects.
Rejects gathered and argued for the few,
No matter how they were viewed.

The crime scene turned into the Nineteenth.
Signed into law,
The right to vote was given to us all.

Indicating this choice,
We now have a voice.
Never forget,
Our “poise” should not be unvoiced,
We must rejoice.
"Never Forget"
Sophia Z.
Grade 12
East Grand Rapids Public School District
Category: Poetry

Author Statement

My poem is about 9/11 and honors those who risked their lives. I looked back at the time I talked to my Uncle who lived in New York City at the time, and tried to put all of his emotions into the poem. My project aligns with the theme Never Forget as it shows that though lives were taken, they will never be forgotten.
Never Forget

September 11,
A tragic, unforgettable day
Where blue skies suddenly turned gray,
Smiles into tears,
And feelings of safety into fears.

A day of terror, fear, and devastation
Along with indescribable emotions
When America forever changed.

Like an evil spirit attacking the soul
The twin towers are hit.
Who knew America could change in minutes?

Heroes have been lost
Family members have been lost
Workers have been lost
American lives are lost.
Their bodies are gone,
But their souls are never forgotten.

Though America has lost so much
The American flag will forever fly
Carrying its meaning through such
And the remembrance of these lives will never die.