



2025-2026: Interwoven Histories
**The Henry Pestka
Art & Poetry
Contest**

Presented by
The West Michigan
Holocaust Partnership



The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest is ideal for project-based learning and compliments course requirements in Social Studies, English Language Arts, Art, and cross-curricular studies.

The West Michigan Holocaust Partnership has curated a collection of high-quality national and local resources and lessons to support educators in creating an authentic and meaningful learning experiences for students in meeting the six hours of Holocaust and Genocide education standards required for Michigan students. The resources are from organizations such as the U.S. Holocaust Museum and the USC Shoah Foundation; projects such as Echoes & Reflections; and the PBS Ken Burns' documentary "The U.S. and the Holocaust", presented in a format that allow teachers to easily navigate to age-appropriate content that best aligns with their goals and needs in teaching about the Holocaust.

Visit
**The Henry Pestka
Art & Poetry Contest**

Student Exhibit

May 6 - June 1, 2026

2025-2026: Interwoven Histories

at
**Frederik Meijer Gardens
and Sculpture Park**

The West Michigan Holocaust Partnership



The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

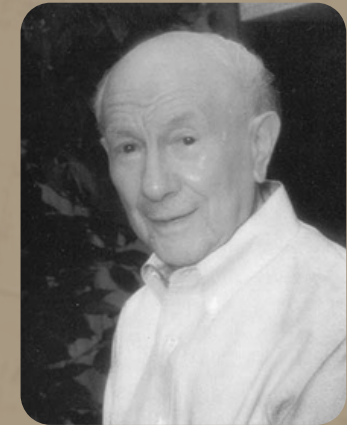
The Pestka Family, in memory of their father and grandfather, **Henry Pestka**, a Holocaust survivor, is proud to bring Holocaust awareness and education to West Michigan students in grades 6-12 through an art and poetry contest.

HENRY PESTKA (1919- 2013)

Henry was born in Ciechanow (Cheh-ha-nouf), Poland. In 1940, at the age of 21, Henry was first sent to Aushchwitz Birkenau, and then on to other camps. While interned in Germany, Henry escaped with two other prisoners in 1944, and hid in a field, near death, until they were found by the Free French Army. After his liberation, Henry joined and served with the Polish Battalion until the war ended. Of the six members of his family, Henry was the sole survivor.

In 1946, Henry immigrated to the United States and settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan, learning English at Union High School and working to build a life for himself. Eventually, he became a real estate developer. Henry and his wife, Beatrice, were married in 1948, raised two children, Steve and Linda, and were proud grandparents to Alissa, Stephanie, and Nathan.

Henry believed strongly in treating everyone with dignity and respect, caring for others, and giving back. He valued education and strong personal character. While the trauma of the Holocaust remained with Henry, he was determined not to let it define him. When asked what message he would like to leave to future generations, Henry said, "To never let anything like this happen to any group of people. To resist hatred and scapegoating."



Words, images, and memory connect the past to the present. The Holocaust and other genocides of the 20th century reveal both differences and striking similarities in how hatred and exclusion escalate to violence and mass murder. Studying these histories side by side allows us to recognize recurring patterns—propaganda, silence, complicity, and the failure to protect vulnerable communities—that pave the way to atrocity.

Guided by what you learn, create an art or writing piece that examines the Holocaust in connection with one or more other 20th-century (1900–1999) genocides or mass atrocities. Your work should reflect how history is interwoven, and how lessons from the Holocaust illuminate the enduring dangers of hatred in all its forms.

Interwoven Histories

Interactive & Local Holocaust Education Resources

Stories of Local Holocaust Survivors



West Michigan Holocaust Memorial Website
bit.ly/44BjHWK

Chat with a Holocaust Survivor



Dimensions in Testimony
bit.ly/3Em9e7b

Inside Kristallnacht



XR Immersive Experience
bit.ly/44zOdQP

Browse the 25-26 Collection of Contest Resources



bit.ly/3RsLOel

“L’dor V’dor: An Eternal Tree”



Emmy Nominated Documentary from WGUV
bit.ly/4e3OGMx

Art: Learning Resources



GVSU Collection for Pestka Contest
bit.ly/4jMrzt4

Holocaust Images & Art



bit.ly/4jKYVIG

bit.ly/3EB2Ys4

Shared for Pestka Contest by GRAM

Historical Artifacts



Share for Pestka by GRPM
bit.ly/4jOwKIR

A cadastral map is a detailed representation of an area of land. It outlines land parcels, designed to provide details about land ownership, property boundaries, and the physical characteristics of the area.

These maps are used by property owners, real estate professionals and government officials as a tool in land management to navigate property transactions as well as resolve property disputes.

What do you notice about this cadastral map from 1929?

Based on what you know about the Holocaust and World War II, if you looked at a series of cadastral maps from 1930-1960, what do you think you would see? What might be different or the same?

1929 Cadastral Map Ciecchanow, Poland

provided by Dr. Rob Franciosi
Grand Valley State University



Poland, 1933-1945
National Holocaust Memorial Museum
Visualize how Poland changes through occupation, war and the Holocaust with this map journey.



bit.ly/3Gynb2e

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

2025-2026 Student Finalists

"A destruction, an annihilation that only man can provoke, only man can prevent."

-Elie Weisel

The West Michigan Holocaust Partnership Presents

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

2025-2026: Interwoven Histories

For Grades 6-12

WGUV.ORG/PESTKA



Echoes in the Ashes

They say it began with words—
Whispers that turned into slogans,
Slogans that turned into laws.
Neighbors looked away.
The trains ran on time.
The sky filled with smoke
that carried no names,
only numbers.

Europe wept once,
But the world didn't learn.

Years later, in Cambodia's fields,
rice grew over bones.
In Rwanda, rivers choked on bodies
that once shared classrooms, laughter, and dreams of the future.
In Bosnia, the echo returned—
men stolen from towns,
their silence swallowed by the earth.

Each time, we said "never again."
Each time, the promise unraveled
beneath the weight of disbelief,
the simple convenience of looking away.

What joins them is not geography,
But the rhythm of forgetting—
the way hate is rehearsed
until it sounds like a reason,
silence becomes a weapon
sharper than any blade.

Memory—
memory resists.
It speaks through the names carved in stone,
Through stories whispered in the classroom,
Through the summaries skimmed over in textbooks,
Through the courage of saying,
This happened, and it can happen again.

Let us listen,
not to the echoes of ash and bone,
But to the beating heart that remains—
A reminder that humanity's survival
depends on remembrance.

Emily G.

Grade 12

East Grand Rapids High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

I wrote this poem to highlight a scary time in history. To understand the pain and suffering of the Jewish people in hopes that we will never live through a time like this again.

This poem explores the power of words and how they shape history. In studying the Holocaust, I learned that atrocities do not begin with violence alone—they often begin with language. Small shifts in words and ideas can slowly normalize hatred, turning whispers into slogans and slogans into laws. I wanted my poem to show how language can prepare a society to accept injustice and look away from the suffering of others. At the same time, the poem reflects the other side of language: its power to remember. Words can preserve stories that might otherwise disappear. By referencing other genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Bosnia, I wanted to show that the pattern of hatred and silence has repeated throughout history. Each time, people promise “never again,” yet forgetting and indifference allow similar tragedies to occur. Through this piece, I use poetry as a form of remembrance. Memory, storytelling, and education are ways that words resist erasure. By speaking about these events and acknowledging their victims, we challenge silence and confront the dangers of forgetting. Ultimately, this poem argues that humanity’s future depends on how we use words—whether we allow them to divide and justify cruelty, or use them to remember, warn, and protect one another.

The Repeated Cycle of Genocide

Genocide

Like a flood destroying, separating
Like a black cloud you know is coming
Like an earthquake shaking the world

Hatred

Like a burning building, spreading
Like a wall too high to climb
Like a fight impossible to win

Exclusion

Like a brutal rejection
Like a room closing in on you
Like a force pulling you back down

Fear

Like words caught in your throat
Like needing to run but can't
Like spreading, you can't stop

Silence

Like a force holding your breath
Like you're silently drowning
Like a cry for help not heard

Propaganda

Like a rumor you can't beat
Like a false narrative you can't stop
Like a fire you don't know how to put out

Dehumanization

People like dirt on a path
People labeled as numbers, not names
People disappearing while still alive

Genocide

Like the Holocaust
Like in Indonesia
Like in Bangladesh

Again and again, history repeats itself

Different victims
Different places
Same process and consequences

Kolonia
Trzcianka

Brielle V.

Grade 9
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

I wrote my poem “The Repeated Cycle of Genocide” about how genocide is continued to this day and how it has become a repeating process occurring across many different places and time periods. While I focus on the Holocaust, I also connect it to other genocides, such as those in Indonesia and Bangladesh, to show how all genocides have similar recurring processes, just like the repetition used in my poem. My poem’s main message is to show that, although the victims and locations change, the genocide process remains the same. I structured my poem around single powerful words such as Hatred, Exclusion, Fear, Silence, Propaganda, and Dehumanization because these occur in many genocides. This choice reflects the theme of Interwoven Histories as it shows that genocides are connected through repeated actions. I wanted the reader to feel how these emotions felt to the victims of these massacres, while also building up to genocide, and not just throwing it at the reader. I also intentionally used simple and universal imagery, such as fire, floods, walls, and earthquakes, as the imagery is simple and easy to understand. I wanted to include dehumanization as a special section different from the other stanzas to emphasize that the poem is about real people, people with families, names, feelings, real people who suffered. This section also emphasized that genocide is possible only after people are stripped of their names, identities, and humanity. At the end of my poem, I reference genocide again and connect the Holocaust to other genocides, showing that every genocide leads to another in the repeated cycle of genocide. This ending is also meant to remind the readers that genocide is not just something that happened in the past but something that happens still to this day. My intention for this poem is to encourage people to be more aware of the consequences of genocides.

Repeating

History does not move in straight lines,
It loops and comes back around
The Armenian genocide happened first
but the world did not make a sound.

People were blamed for things not their fault,
Called names, pushed aside.
They were seen as less than humans,
And many people just watched and denied

Years later the Holocaust began,
With hate that looked the same.
Different place, different people,
But the same old fear and blame

The Holocaust shows us how hate grows slow,
First with words, then laws, then pain
These lessons shine back on armenia
showing history repeating again.

If we forget one story, we forget them all,
Hatred finds its way.
History is interwoven like threads in cloth,
Teaching us to speak, remember, and say no one way.

Kaylynn S.

Grade 9
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

My project is about the holocaust and the Armenian genocide and how these two events are connected through history. Even though they happened in different times and places, they are interwoven because they both show how hatred can grow when people are ignored, blamed, or seen as less than human. I wanted my project to show that genocide does not just appear suddenly. It builds over time, and history shows us the warning signs. I chose to connect the holocaust with the armenian genocide because the Armenian genocide happened first, and the world did not do anything to stop it. Many people denied it or stayed silent. Later, during the holocaust, jewish people suffered in similar ways. Learning this made me realize that when history is ignored, it can repeat itself. The holocaust helps illuminate the dangers of hatred because it clearly shows how words, lies, and fear can slowly turn into violence and death. Words were used during the holocaust to spread hate, just like words today can be used to hurt or to help. My writing project reflects this power by using words to remember. Explain, and warn. Even simple words can carry strong meaning, and I wanted my voice to show that you do not have to be perfect to speak about important things. My intention for this work is for others to understand that history is interwoven and that remembering one genocide means remembering them all. I hope this project makes people think about how hatred still exists today and how silence can be dangerous. I want people to see that learning about the holocaust is not just about the past, but about protecting the future. Through this project. I learned that the holocaust teaches us how quickly hate can spread when people believe lies and stop seeing others as human. I also learned that remembering events like the armenian genocide matters because denial can lead to repetition. I hope my work helps others see why words, memory, and speaking up are powerful tools against hatred in all its forms.

I Grant, Your Refuge

In Auschwitz,
smoke heavy in the sky,
families could not be together.
People granted a number instead of their name,
there were so many people in this world to blame.

The Holocaust was not done by accident,
it was labeled a hate crime.
It began with the hateful speeches;
the Jewish were treated like a herd.
They were being led like sheep
in Hitler's hateful heap.

Jewish people were treated like minorities,
This was all a part of his disturbing plan.
Lies were cycling,
until they sounded like sweet words of wisdom to that
horrible man.

Long time after, in Rwanda,
hatred spread again.
In the mid-months of 1994,
thousands of souls perished,
guilt filled others' hearts.

In Cambodia,
the people were punished for things they couldn't
control,
such as being of a different ethnic groups.
The land became tombs,
Cambodians' bodies filled them.

These tragic times were of different eras,
But they had equal principles;
fear, lies, and the idea that
certain lives were not important in this world.

History has given us many signs.
Hate can expand quickly,
If we can not explain,
that we can help put a stop to this messed-up system.

We need to keep these events in mind,
so we can make the choice to better,
and protect ourselves and others,
instead of this constant hurt.

Safiyah W.

Grade 9
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

My poem is about the Holocaust and two other genocides such as the Rwanda and Cambodia genocide. I chose to write about Rwanda and Cambodia because those two genocides are similar to the Holocaust. They are both about other civilians who aren't like the people being discriminated against. My full intentions for this poem is to show people that not only the Holocaust had a major genocide. My goal for this piece is to make the audience reflect the choices of the peoples decisions for starting and participating in these mass genocides. The death count for Rwanda was, 800,000, Cambodia was, 1.2 to 2.8 million, and the Holocaust was approximately 6 million. Disgustingly, all these genocides resulted in a very high death count. This means, all these innocent, poor, young or even older lives were taken on major discriminatory levels. My poem connects to the interwoven histories by even using an example from today, with the Russian and Ukrainian war where many lives are being taken just simply because they are in the presence of the war. So many people are being killed even though they have absolutely no part in the war; like being a military officer. I really want the readers to understand that other genocides that are apart from these are sometimes done in silence. There is no minimum or maximum amount of deaths to count it as a genocide. If the reader only read the poem once, they would miss the intensity of how these genocides shine their similarities. This poem signifies awareness. Mostly about the hate in this world. There is no reason that anyone should be killed and/or tortured based on something they can not control. We also need to remember the similar events in the past and the future. To conclude my statement, we as a society need to emphasize that this is never gonna go our way unless we help to put a stop to these events.

Resurfacing

Hatred is a piece of emotion.
Emotion is a deep connection to the ocean.
Ocean full of past experiences of genocide.
Genocide is always as bad to identify.

Ocean spits past experiences to modern day.
Modern-day explains past events on display.
The buoyancy of repressed memories.
Influence, propaganda spread by enemies.

This influence of enemies repeats constantly.
Starting from the Holocaust, a constant theme.
The Holocaust is one memory that never sinks.
The Holocaust never shrinks it links.

Modern-day events that link to genocide.
one event, gaza, that's set aside.
Modern-day influence to dehumanize.
Dehumanize makes people revolt

Holocaust, hatred, superiority, resurface.
This memory is a dark purpose.
Purpose to link to new events.
The contents present new segments.

Bosnia, a reflection of hatred.
Hatred displays a "us vs them" was created.
Reason for creation to feel superiority.
Superiority makes one race have authority.

Holocaust a repeating, constant enemy.
Enemies create a false identity.
Holocaust, interwoven by past and future.
Holocaust started and spread by one rumor.

One idea can be used as positive or negative.
If negative, it can be wrongly effective.
Your idea can influence modern day.
Modern day can show what you display.

Humanity never stops growing.
Humanity will never stop knowing.
Humanity sets their heads high.
Humanity will improve and touch the sky.

Dominic C.
Grade 9
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

My poem is about how your brain acts like an ocean pushing past bad experiences or events deep in your brain, so you don't think of them. The holocaust is one memory that is constantly buoyant and stays on top of the ocean of your memories, even though it is as bad as it is. The Holocaust is so impactful that it started to infect and link to modern-day events like Gaza and Bosnia in the memories of these events. One thing I do know is that when you push these memories down, you will be many more events that link to the Holocaust from the past and the future. What I hope is that when others read this poem, is that they know what effects and how they impact as people in these horrible events. The reason why I chose the idea of memories connecting to the ocean is how when I think of anything its random, but when I go to see a friend, I think of all the fun memories. So when you push bad events down so far in your brain, once you look at something that reminds you of whatever, it comes back to remind you. The Holocaust is like for lots of people. For example, when you think of genocide or Jewish people dying, your brain goes straight to the holocaust because of how impactful it is in history, present, past, and future. I believe that humanity, one day, will advance and not go back to these cruel, horrific events. I believe humanity also needs to learn from this event rather than dwell on it. Modern-day children need to know what happened so they can take the torch and improve on what we came from. My project connects to the theme of how halocaust interwoven with modern-day events, such as Bosnia and Gaza. These events had the same types of cruel behavior, from dehumanization and hatred to different groups other than the superior groups.

Repeat

If not learned, it repeats.
If silent, it repeats.
Lessons that were already learned,
just to be learnt again,
again and again.
People die, get hurt, we know this but,
it still happens.
It must be silly to think that history can repeat itself,
even though we already went through it.
Well,
a simple lesson, like this, can be
easily overlooked.
Cowards,
are the people that don't want to speak up,
don't want to acknowledge
the past.
They can say that they want to help,
but they are silent when there is a cry for help.
Actions like this are crimes as bad
as the ones that are committing genocide.
Ignorant,
is the government
that only cares about their beneficial gain,
can't be bothered by others' suffering.
And in a blink of an eye,
it starts all over again.

Chelsea D.

Grade 9
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

I chose to show my ideas through my poem, "Repeat", because I think words can present a powerful message that everyone can be able to understand. This piece is about being silent or not speaking out, can repeat history, like the Holocaust or other genocide, which connects to the theme interwoven histories. I wanted to emphasize just how important it is to not be quiet and spread awareness. If not, then history can just repeat itself, even becoming worse and worse every time. Lives are harmed and we shouldn't just do nothing, it would be just a repeat of the Holocaust or past/ongoing genocides. In my poem, it calls out people who stayed silent and the government because just how horribly the actions they made impacted innocent people. By not speaking out, people or countries can be seen as allowing the perpetrators to continue their actions, becoming silent partners in the crime. Also, if someone doesn't want to stand up then someone will want to follow them and then next you know it nobody will be standing up for the oppressed group. Naturally, people want to follow the crowd. I want the audience to think how it must have felt having no one to rely on, no one to protect them. How it must have felt being hated by and not being treated fairly. For the victims, silence represents a sense of betrayal and abandonment during their most desperate time. It denies their suffering and undermines their humanity. My project connects to the theme of Interwoven Histories by showing the audience to think that being quiet and not doing nothing about it, hurts everyone. The takeaway is that I think people should learn about bad mistakes made in history and actually do something to prevent it from happening again. If everyone came together and made their voices heard, it can make a difference, rather than being silent.

Surging Silence

Torn between two parts of a whole,
My voice.....trapped,
I feel my brain cycling through the options,
It is so much easier to follow the voice of selfish silence,
It is comfortable on this side,
It is easy on this side,
I can't stop it all, I can't stop the rolling tide that is
humanity,
It's warmer on this side,
As warm as it is the ache in my heart will not stop,
It pulls me ever so slowly to the rope bridge that is my
conscience,
One look stops me in tracks,
One look forces me to take two steps back,
It is so easy over here, It is so warm,
I will just go back and not look toward the ravine and
ignore the sounds that are not mine,
Ignore the pain the world causes,
Stick to my own regime and clauses,
Ignore my heart when it beats too quick then pauses,
As I contemplate staying in the comfort that is my reality,
I look up only to find myself on the bridge,
It is torn and ragged,
Like anything worth something it's not smooth but jagged,
It is so selfish to stay but so hard to cross,
So much to gain by staying, to cross feels like never-
ending loss,
What will they say if I use my voice for something more?
Time to open a new chapter, to open a new door!
Comfort is a curse that it is time to break,
I cross the bridge into the biting cold,
the other side is just as warm,
Getting here was the hardest part,
Time to use my voice to help others,
Time for a fresh start

Kenzie C.

Grade 9

Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

The first thing I wanted the audience to feel was how it seemed as though they were caught in the middle of an undecided decision to either do the right thing or what's comfortable. This poem is about how people don't speak their minds about what is right because they worried about what other people would think, do or say. But in reality holding in those thoughts and feelings isn't doing anything other than make yourself feel worse, It also isn't helping the person or people that really need someone to speak up. I intentionally included the weather in my poem, because just like in summertime when it's all nice and sunny, there isn't school to worry about. It's comfortable. Just like not speaking your mind for the greater good is comfortable because you don't have to try, you just stay quiet. My goal for this piece is to make the audience think about how you have impacted other people's lives in either a good or bad way. And if you're thinking well I've never been mean or talked bad about someone, it doesn't mean you still haven't because sometimes the most damaging thing is when you don't say anything. I hope that once you're finished reading my poem you will take a few minutes out of your day to think about how you can always do something no matter how big or small it might be. The history of the Holocaust is woven into my project through the people that stood by and watched people getting taken away. And for what reason? Exactly what reason did they do something wrong, did they all commit a crime? No one knew, even though innocent parents and children were getting taken away for no reason at all. No one said anything. This is how the holocaust and my poem about speaking up relate because just like how no one spoke their minds before because they didn't know what people would think or do. It's just like how people think today we are all scared of what others think so we decide to not say anything, but we need to. The one thing I hope you take after reading this is the next time you have a chance to say something do it, because it may just save that person.

The Carousel of Hatred

Jewish, Christian, Black, white
Gay or straight.
It didn't matter
All he had in his heart was hate.
Hate so strong
Stronger than a bomb
A bomb full of anger.
Anger towards all
All that wasn't perfect in those eyes.
Eyes so deeply full of hatred.
Everyone felt the shackles of hatred.
These shackles were put on all.
By this man with a heart full of hate and
Eyes full of anger towards all.
Silenced by the man in brown
As if the world was ok with his actions.
It seemed as if the world had turned a blind eye to us
As if we were going to be left in the dust
As if we were stuck on a never-ending carousel of history,
History where massacres repeat
As if there was a loose bolt in the carousel, making it
shake
Causing history to repeat
Time and time again
And no one seems to catch the hint
That it's going to happen again.

Landon W.

Grade 9

Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

My poem "The Carousel of Hatred" is about a person in a concentration camp reflecting on their view of the world. and what it was like inside a concentration camp. The reason I chose a poem over a drawing is that the poem really spoke to me. I felt like I was a poet while writing this, and I enjoyed writing the poem about the holocaust because of how interesting it was, and how the world somewhat let it happen, and no one did anything for a very long time, as if they didnt care what happened to people in Germany and other places. I chose to say as if there was a loose bolt in a carousel, and it caused the carousel to shake, causing history to repeat itself. I took this point of view because a carecell is like a clock spinning and if something goes wrong in the clocks system it will miss resent what the actual time is, my goal for this poem was to make people realize that we cant keep letting history repeat itself, as if we are in a never ending cycle of bad leaders doing bad things leading to mass murder or worse. I am trying to create an image in the reader's mind of what it might have been like to be neglected at this time. My hope for this poem is for the people who read it get that image of what it may have been like to be there, and what it felt like to be forgotten by the world.

The Web of Hate

This world is trapped by a web of hate
We deny this web, we move on from it
But again and again
Our hatred repeats, our violence continues
This web grows
The millions that died in the Holocaust
Sickened, starved, shot, dead
This web feasted on that hatred
And the world continued on
The millions that died in the Cambodian Genocide
Executed, starved, murdered, killed
Again and again
The world is entrapped in this web
Where hatred goes on for miles upon miles upon lifetimes
The spider spins hate that we cannot see past
Humans, hating humans
Humans, torturing humans
Humans, killing humans
We cannot see past our hatred
We have been stuck in this web for so long

Kaylee E.

Grade 9

Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

My poem “The Web of Hate” represents the connection between the different genocides and the commonalities shared between them. This poem connects to the theme of interwoven history, as it shows the connections between the different genocides, with the web representing all the similarities shared between the genocides. The web represents how the world is trapped and surrounded by violence and hatred, and how each time an act of violence is committed, the “web” grows more. I compared the Holocaust with the Cambodian Genocide and compared how they both are a part of the same “web of hatred” and both resulted in millions of deaths out of violence and hatred. I chose to use a web in my writing to represent the connections between two different genocides because I see webs as a symbol of connection. Not all parts of a web are connected by a singular common string, but rather are connected through other strings to connect with the main string, which is how I represented the genocides. While the genocides are not directly associated with one another, both genocides are connected through the same string of hatred and violence to humans. I also represented the earth being trapped in the web of hatred by indirectly comparing it to how a spider traps insects in its web. The spider, which spins the hatred, represents the hatred we humans experience and become entrapped in. The web goes on for “miles and miles”, symbolizing the graves that stretch on for miles and miles, caused by the hatred and violence. I wanted to express in my writing how the Holocaust and the Cambodian Genocide, while both having their respective differences and contrastions, stem from the same shared root, which is hatred. I hope my writing expresses how violence leads to the same end result of death and hatred, and how us humans have killed other humans and brought pain, harm, and death out of hatred for another, despite the fact that we are all humans.

Helpless

Helpless
All alone. Helpless
All I can think is why, why us
Who gave them this
This power
This ruling
This narrative of take and never give.
Because what do I get?
A reward?
A reward for living this life
Always getting taken from
But never on the receiving end.
Because I want some to
I want power
I want a family
I want to live
But I guess we all don't get to pick and choose right?
But that's how it goes around here
He runs the show
And strips from the helpless.
Footsteps
Loud heavy footsteps.
Very heavy, like soaking wet boots
Echoing Closer and closer.
Screams ring, shots fire.
I feel nothing
Only my body hit the floor
I'm fading
Fading fast
And all I can think is
What can I do
I'm a Jew
Im Worthless
Im
helpless

Dominic H.
Grade 9
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

Hello, My name is Dominic Hartman, student of Kenowa Hills High School. I chose to represent my ideas through a poem because I felt I could express my emotions, my concept, and image of what really happened in the holocaust. I know I wasn't there at the time, but what I do know is not only the unfairness that brung, but the false narratives through the whole entire devastation of the occurrence. The first thing I wanted the audience to feel was the emotion I put into every word of this poem. Every word I typed is something I felt how the Jewish felt and that means something deeper than just words or a poem about the holocaust. What it means is the true tragedy of what happened in that dark time. This Project is about interwoven history. Things like these don't happen every now and then as a coincidence. These happen way too often with bad and terrible intentions behind all the actions and tragedies they cause. I intentionally made my first line only one word to intrigue the reader. It's not everyday you read a poem that starts off with one word let alone a strong emotional word. My goal for this piece is to spread awareness to not just the reader, but to anyone who cares and is curious about the topic. Obviously, I know this isn't a 5 page article with photographic evidence, but what I do know is that I want people to know. Know the truth, whether that is by telling simple facts about the holocaust to peers, or writing poems about it. I believe this shows that history does not exist in isolation due to the writing of the poem. Take the context of my poem and you will know it's referring to the Holocaust. But if you only read the poem, this can be about many tragedies currently happening due to interwoven history and events like this that keep recurring on this earth.

Someday, It Won't Just Be "Someday"

What can you do when repetition is a disease
When the world follows the suit of a rampant man's "expertise"
What can you say when it happens again
When the violence is written with the same old red pen
When homes turn to camps, passed notes turn to letters and stamps
When people take a chance and get killed at his demand
When the same streets in which people walked to their death
Are now filled with protest against the corrupt and inept
When the walls containing violence are unleashed once more
You try to stack the bricks upright but they crumble to the floor
When the screams still echo in an empty, vacant room
They slam the door and pray to god that nothing will ensue
When parallel timelines finally intersect
We're left with nothing but the familiar feeling of regret
We all know but don't say, we know the price but don't pay
The feeling that someday it won't just be "someday"
Soaking in the slander, dancing past the answer
Feeding into the cure when they know it gives them cancer
But you can't close your eyes when they're forcefully pried
Open to their brink, makes you blink and realize
That the words that we speak to spread awareness today
Are the same words that will one day be taken away
And the textbooks that rhyme and read in the same font
Are the instructions of genocide that each generation is taught

Aili H.

Grade 9

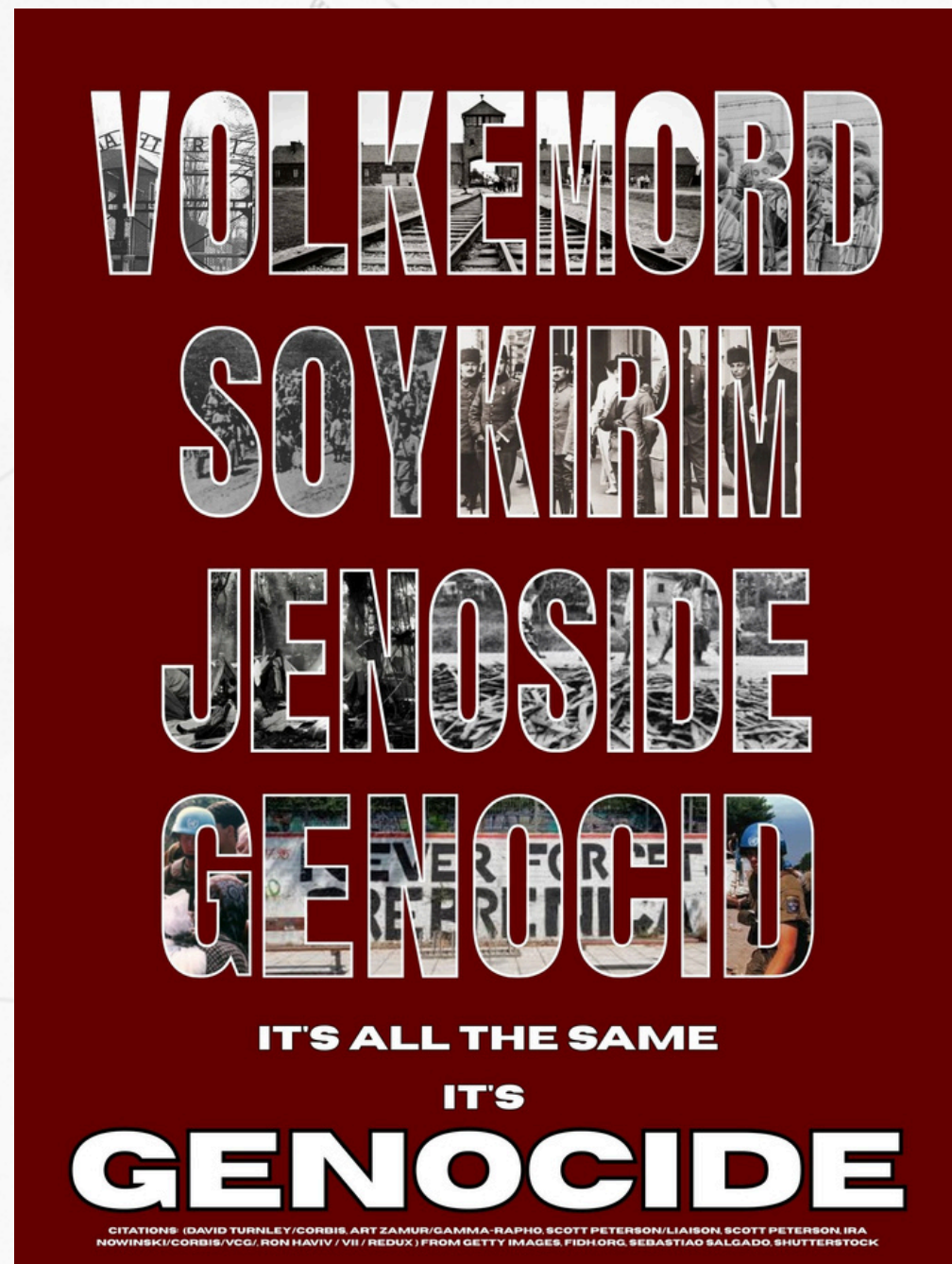
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

When people read my poem, I want them to think about the present, the past, and how the two are constantly mirroring each other. The word choice is all very carefully intentional, strengthening the reader's understanding of the prompt and main idea, "interwoven histories". I directly reference events from the Holocaust (specifically lines 5-7), comparing it to every present and future genocide and mass atrocity. While each event should be acknowledged separately and given its own specific attention, most of these genocides have specific, recognizable patterns and signs. My poem is directed towards the people, begging the question as to why we let the same things happen over and over even while knowing how bad it could turn out. The main point I want to get across is that we, as a society, always find a way to turn a blind eye even when it is obvious that we are entering a familiar, scary period of time where groups of people are so violently affected by genocidal tendencies. Spreading awareness is easy and can influence people to take action against discrimination, families being ripped apart, violence, murder, and all types of hate. We see our leaders purposefully overlooking horrible things, and we as a people never call them out for it. And, like lines 13 and 14, if we do not speak out when we have the chance, we will regret it. When we look back at history, it almost does seem like instructions for genocide (lines 23 and 24) - exact steps as to how these horrible, irreversible events occurred. It seems like, instead of understanding that these steps are the exact opposite of what we need to do, we keep on walking down the same path. It is important to recognize the patterns and understand how to avoid them.

Its All The Same



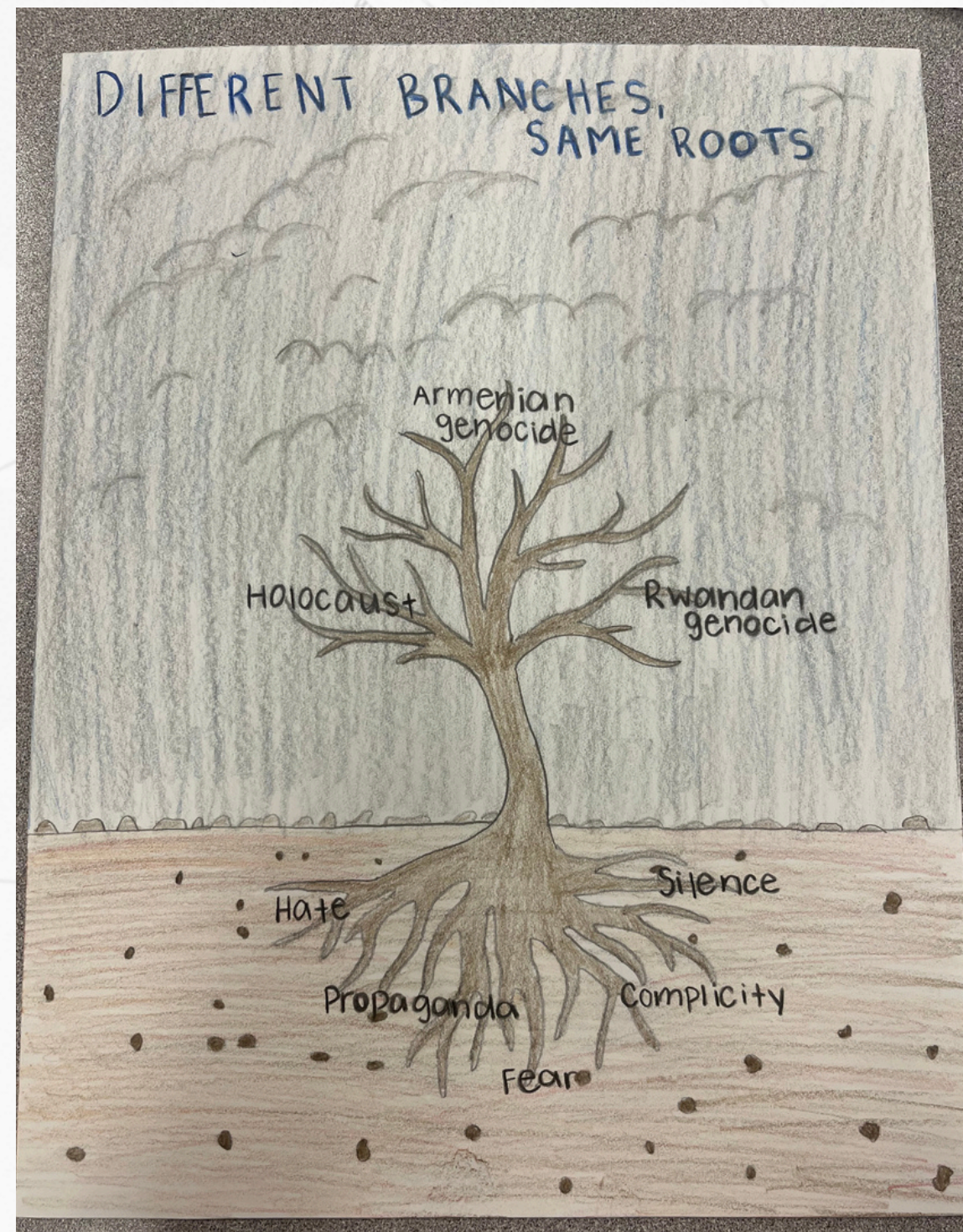
Ella McKeiver
Grade 10
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

I created "Its all the same" to accentuate the idea that all genocide is the same, and it all connects to one major idea, hate. In my project, the main focus is on four large words. Each of these words translates to "Genocide" in English. Reading from top to bottom the languages are German, Turkish, Kinyarwanda, and Croatian. Each of these languages represents the language perpetrators of genocide spoke. The German word represents the Holocaust, and the Nazi Germany army that caused the largest mass killing in history. Inside the word "Volemord" are three images famously known from that time. The sign of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the main entrance gate to Auschwitz II-Birkenau, and young boys and men who are within the camp. These images all define and show the true extent to which the Holocaust meant to the world, and shaped the definition of the word 'Genocide'. The next word, "Soykirm", is the Turkish translation and represents the Armenian Genocide. The Ottoman empire tortured, starved, killed, and deported roughly 1.2 million Christian Armenians. Within this translation are two images. The left shows Ottoman troops guarding Armenians being deported. The image on the right is Ottoman guarding the streets. Both of these images show how powerful this empire was and how driven they were to eliminate the minority. "Jenoside" is the translation of Kinyarwanda, a language of the Hutu Tribe. The Hutu were the extremist terrorist group in Rwanda, who killed 500,000 to 1 million Tutsi in 100 days. The first image is a refugee camp in the city of Goma, in the hopes of escaping the mass killing and torture. The second image is hundreds of hatchets that were disposed of due to dullness from killing. This genocide was detrimental to the "modern world" as it took place in 1994, and showed that genocide is not something from 100 years ago, but present. The final translation is "Genocide", which is Croatian, the language of the Army of Republika Srpska. The Republika Srpska was the main perpetrator on the Bosnian genocide, which killed around 8,000 Bosnian Muslim boys and men. The image on the left is the Serbian army tending to Bosnian victims, the middle image is a graffiti-covered wall that protests never forgetting the genocide and victims, and the final image is a woman crying and pleading to a Serbian soldier for help. These images show the heartbreak that pure hatred and inhumane actions bring. Finally, the phrase "it's all the same, it's genocide" is impactful due to its clear meaning. No matter the language, death rate, or location, genocide is all the same. It's the act of hatred bestowed on a group of people, and it must end. All genocide stems all from one feeling, all from one word; it's all interwoven, and it's all the same. It's genocide.

Different Branches, Same Roots



Lily Byer

Grade 10

Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

I created "Different Branches, Same Roots", because it explores the connection between the Holocaust and other genocides of the 20th century. The image shows a tree whose branches represent different genocides, including the Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide, and the Rwandan Genocide. Although these tragedies happened in different places and times, the tree symbolizes how they grew from the same underlying causes. The roots beneath the ground represent the forces that allow genocide to develop. Words such as hatred, propaganda, fear, silence, and complicity are written along the roots to show how these ideas spread beneath the surface before violence ever begins. Just as the roots of a tree are often hidden underground, the early warning signs of genocide are often ignored or unnoticed. However, these forces continue to grow stronger until they eventually lead to devastating consequences. The branches above the ground represent the visible outcomes of these dangerous patterns. Each branch symbolizes a different genocide, showing how similar roots can produce different tragedies across history. By connecting these events through one tree, my artwork reflects how the Holocaust helps us understand other genocides and how the same patterns of hate can repeat if they are not recognized and challenged. I chose to represent these events through a tree because trees are often associated with life, growth, and history. In this piece, however, the tree also serves as a warning. It reminds us that hatred and violence do not appear suddenly, they grow gradually from ideas and actions that society allows to take root. The tree's branches spreading outward show how the consequences of hatred can affect many communities across the world. Through this artwork, I hope viewers will understand that genocide is not only a part of the past but also a warning for the future. By studying the Holocaust alongside other genocides, we can recognize patterns such as propaganda, dehumanization, and silence that make these atrocities possible. Remembering these events is essential because it helps us identify these warning signs and take action before hatred grows into violence again.

Interlaced History



A'zaria Johnson
Grade 11
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

To be honest, I was thinking about not entering the contest this year, because I found the prompt challenging. The prompt challenged me because I was not aware of the fact that there were multiple genocides in the past. I asked my mom for help since I was stuck and confused, and together, we chose to focus on the Rwandan Genocide and the Holocaust. There were plenty of movies and websites about the Rwandan Genocide, so I was able to learn a lot. Though it is not completely like the Holocaust, I thought there were some similarities when I was doing my research on Rwanda. Despite them being almost fifty years apart, I know that they both left a huge impact on the world and shaped history. On the left side of my artwork, I portrayed the Holocaust: Prisoners stand behind a barbed-wire fence, with a gas chamber in the distance. On the right, I portrayed the Rwandan Genocide: Children enlisted as soldiers, forced to commit carnage at a young age. I outlined them in red to symbolize the blood that may have been shed on their hands.

Edge of Death



Robert Clay
Grade 7
Byron Center

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

Holodomor was a terrible genocide, and I have compared it to the Holocaust. In my artwork i show that the genocide of the Holocaust and the Holodomor were absolute torture. The man stumbling in the field has nothing to eat and a lack of nutrition. And the jew in the cell knows that he is next to the gas chamber and sees the Zyklon B rising into the air. Me and my class mate simbolizes the impact of the Holodomor and the holocaust. I am not a good artist in shading, so digital was the choice for me. I wanted to emphasize the morality of the Holocaust to the Ukrainian famine.

Survivors



Aubri VandeBergy

Grade 8

Byron Center West Middle School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

I have a love for history and over the last few years I have learned a lot about the Holocaust. I have read some books about survivors and what it was like for them to become separated from their families and witness painful losses. When I was creating this artwork, I learned the stories of these two women, Rose Girone and Vartanouche Karayan, and how they survived the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide. The women I chose were amongst some of the last survivors of these tragedies. Though these events took place many years apart and near two world wars, the stories have so many similarities. They both lived long lives allowing them to share in their words, their stories for many years to show the impact of those two genocides and hope for the future. My art piece "survivors" reflects the power of words because these two women, who behind their images have a whole history and stories of survival. Learning stories from people who have lived through tragedies can leave such a powerful impact on everyone. It is hopeful in those stories, that we can learn from them and grow in a positive way as a whole world. In my art, I also included the yellow flowers, the forget me not and the daffodil. These flowers are said to represent hope for the future from those two genocides.

Stolen Futures



Anna Whitcomb

Grade 8

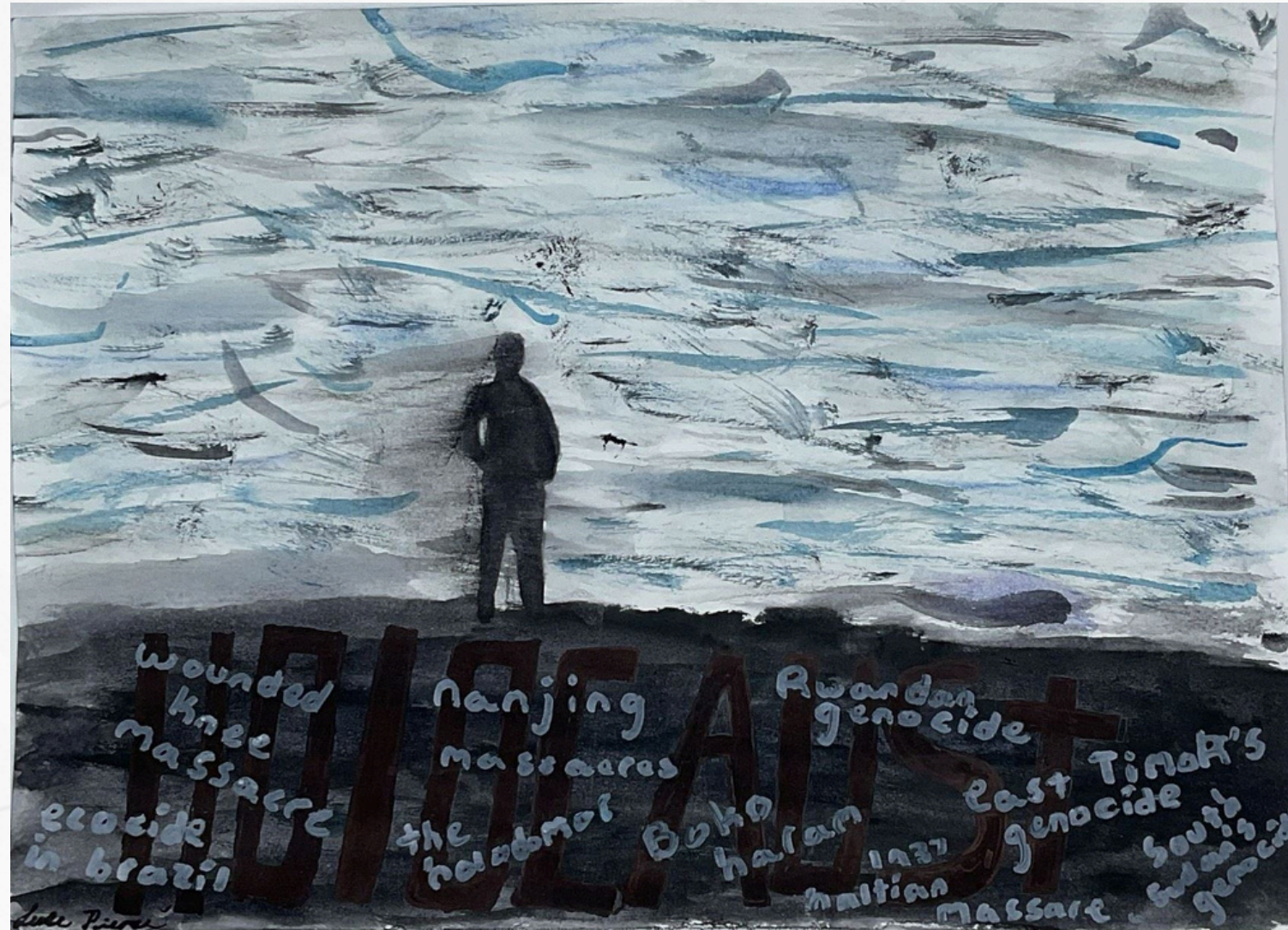
Byron Center West Middle School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

My artwork compares children affected by the Holocaust under Hitler's control to children in Spain under Franco's regime. The teddy bear in my artwork symbolizes child victims who had their futures stolen. Hitler and Franco both used hatred, fear and violence to control people. Both separated children, one of the most vulnerable members of a community, from their families. Mass atrocities can target more than ethnic groups. In Spain, the goal was to erase political identities and government opposition. An estimated 300,000 children were stolen from families who opposed the country's leadership. They were then illegally adopted by families who supported Franco. During the Holocaust, over 1.5 million Jewish children were murdered, along with their family members by the Nazi regime due to racial antisemitism. By studying these histories side by side allows us to recognize patterns of hate that pave the way to atrocities and genocide.

Lost but not Forgotten



Luke Pierce

Grade 8

Byron Center West Middle School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

My project is a watercolor painting titled "Lost but not Forgotten." In this piece, I show different genocides and massacres throughout the 1800's and how we really only hear about the holocaust but all of these other ones happened too. I choose to focus on more than one genocide because there wasn't only 1 or 2 mass genocides that have happened throughout history. My purpose in creating the painting was to represent all of these forgotten lives that are rarely taught in school. I hope the people who see my painting will realize all of these mass genocides were caused by humans and are a result of our actions. To me, interwoven histories mean that all of our history is connected in some form, and no matter how different we may seem, we are all connected in some way. My artpiece shows the concept of interwoven history by using the words on the bottom of the painting, and each message was a genocide or massarce and the Holocaust is in the back because it's the one that people learn about in school, and brings attention to the horrible things that people have done. What I learned about the holocaust is that many people where seperated from friends and family, and many felt alone, hence the lonely man in the middleground. And the blue represents the hope that people had for this to end, to see their family again, and the other colors represent the loss of hope. While creating this piece of art and through the research I've done, I've learned that it was people who caused these events, and that it wasn't all at once, and people would manipulate others accomplish their evil plans. This piece of art is important to me because I strongly believe that all lives matter, no matter what they have done, and everyone and the sacrifices they made should be remembered. In the end i hope that my project reminds people that all lives matter and should all be respected and remembered.

Hate is a Cycle



Winona Kosmicki
Grade 9
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

To protect ourselves and our neighbors, we must speak out. To speak out, we must understand. To understand, we must remember. The truth of the past is infinitely reliable, and the truth of the future is entirely reliant on the past. History is a constant repetition, and that is why it's so necessary that we understand it. I want my art to represent the continuity of history and how easy it is to disregard the past in favor of the future, when, in reality, the latter cannot exist without the former. The collage of pictures is symbolic of how humankind is woven together through history's documentation. I used black-and-white prints of groups of individuals oppressed during the Holocaust to represent how people today pretend that genocides that occurred in the past are irrelevant to today's world. In the bottom left corner, I used an image of Adolf Hitler saluting, showing the brainwashedness of the people who refused to stick up for their neighbors purely because their own humanity was not endangered. In the top right, I used an in-color picture of President Trump saluting, to convey the parallels between Nazi Germany and America's current political state. He is surrounded by magazine cutouts of hungry children in Gaza, mourning Ukrainian soldiers, and Afghanistani women being shepherded around. Beneath him is a cutout from an article describing the false ceasefire negotiated by the Israeli and American governments. The cutout that I felt most significant in this artwork was that of the soldiers lined up along the left-hand side of the page. I felt as though this image was the most important to this piece because it is unlike any other cutout on the page, as it remains in-color even though it crosses into the black-and-white portion of the page. The most recognizable constant in war, genocide, and death throughout history is the soldier. He represents the explicit message that I intended my art to convey: the entwined continuities of genocides in history and the consistent factors of such harm. Generational hatred is ceaseless without true understanding, and to understand, we must remember.

A Reflection of Time



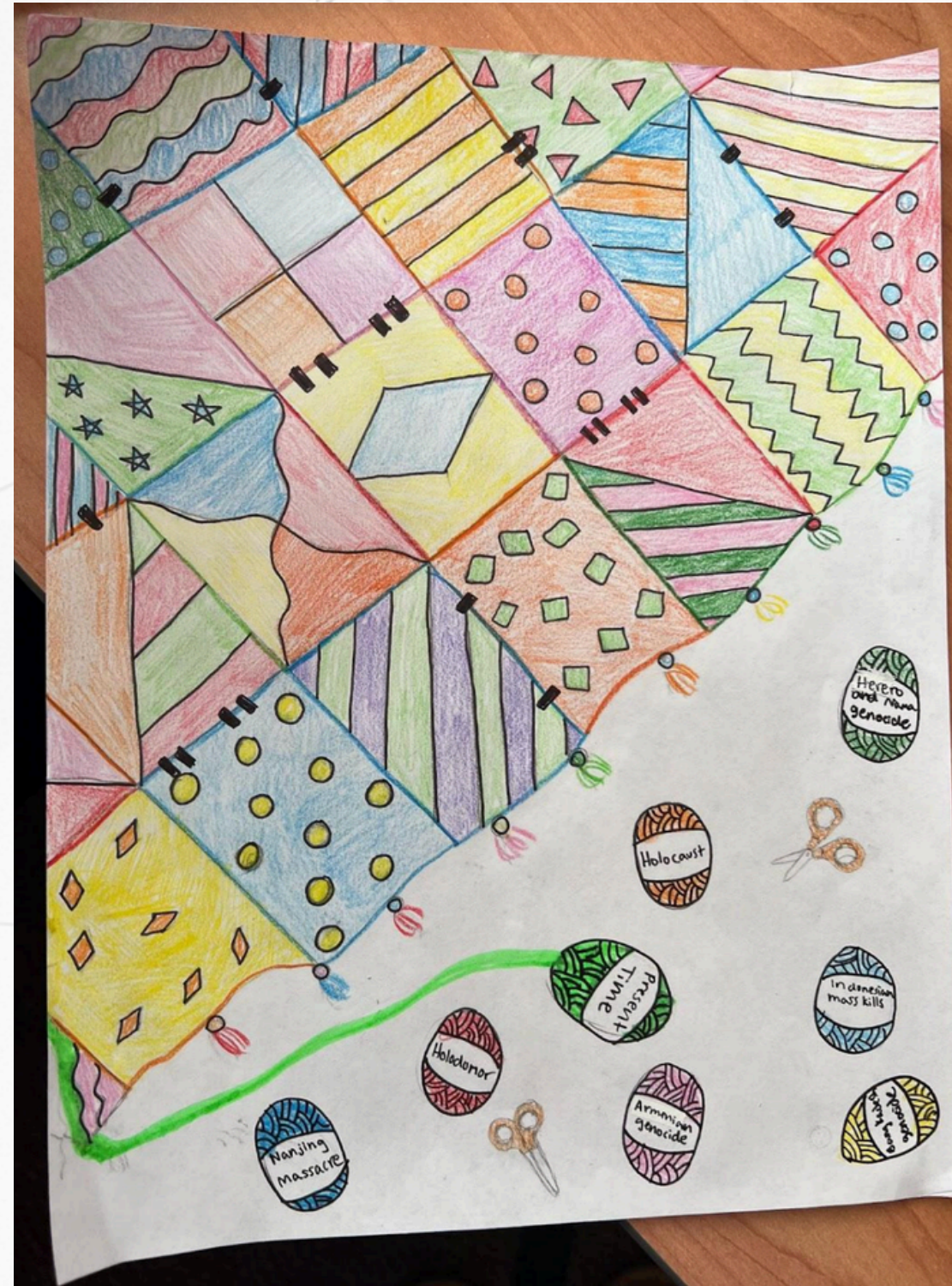
Virginia Jones
Grade 9
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

I chose to represent my ideas through A Reflection of Time because it shows the shared warning signs of genocides: dehumanization, scapegoating, silence, bystanders, and systemic violence. This piece is about the Holocaust and how it connects to what is going on currently involving the immigrants in the United States. I wanted to show that even though both of these minority groups, Jews and immigrants, just want to belong, they are being held back and mistreated because of circumstances they can not necessarily control, such as their faith, nationality, or race. I chose to use watercolor because its softness allowed me to contrast the dull, restrained tones of the Holocaust with the more delicate colors of immigrants today. Watercolor helped me depict both the emotional devastation of history and the current cultural vulnerability that we have today, and connect these human experiences. My goal for this piece is to make the audience reflect on how no human being should be treated as if they are "less than". Everything has beauty, but not everyone can see it. Blaming a group for one person's actions, and going so far as separating families, is simply not right. My project connects to the theme of Interwoven Histories by showing that patterns such as dehumanization and scapegoating are repeated, and truly, times have not changed as much as people believe they have. In my piece, as the immigrants are looking through the fence, they see children and men of the Holocaust looking back at them; both living through the mistreatment and brutality that has been unfairly placed upon them by society. Ultimately, the Holocaust was a cruel and horrific time, and although it may feel like it took place eons ago, it is extremely relevant to our contemporary world. We must continue to strive for a healthier and more inclusive world without hate and discrimination.

Holding the Thread



Olivia Bierema

Grade 9

Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

The first thing I want the audience to notice is how genocides are interwoven into the blanket shown in my drawing. The blanket represents the way different genocides are connected and share repeating patterns throughout history. I included many patterns and visible stitching to emphasize these connections and to show how each event is tied to others that came before and after it. I also used color intentionally so viewers can match specific genocides within the blanket to the labeled yarns, reinforcing the idea that these events are not isolated, but part of a larger pattern. The central message of my project is that genocides can repeat because they follow recognizable patterns. These tragedies should never be forgotten; instead, it should be our responsibility to learn from past mistakes so future genocides can be prevented. However, for this to happen, people cannot remain silent. Silence allows patterns to continue, and I believe it is crucial for viewers to recognize their role in speaking up and taking action. I intentionally included different bundles of yarn labeled with various genocides to show how similar and interconnected they are. The yarn symbolizes how each genocide contributes to the overall structure of the blanket, just as each historical event shapes our present world. The large number of yarn balls also highlights how many genocides have occurred, so many that I was unable to include them all. This work reflects the connection between the past and the present. The blanket is unfinished, representing our current moment in history. It suggests that the blanket will continue to grow if we ignore warning signs and remain silent, or it can finally be completed if we choose to act. My project connects directly to the theme Interwoven Histories by combining many genocides into one shared form. Ultimately, my drawing shows that we hold the thread and the needle, and it is our responsibility to recognize patterns, speak up, and help prevent future genocidal tragedies.

Two Tragedies, One Humanity



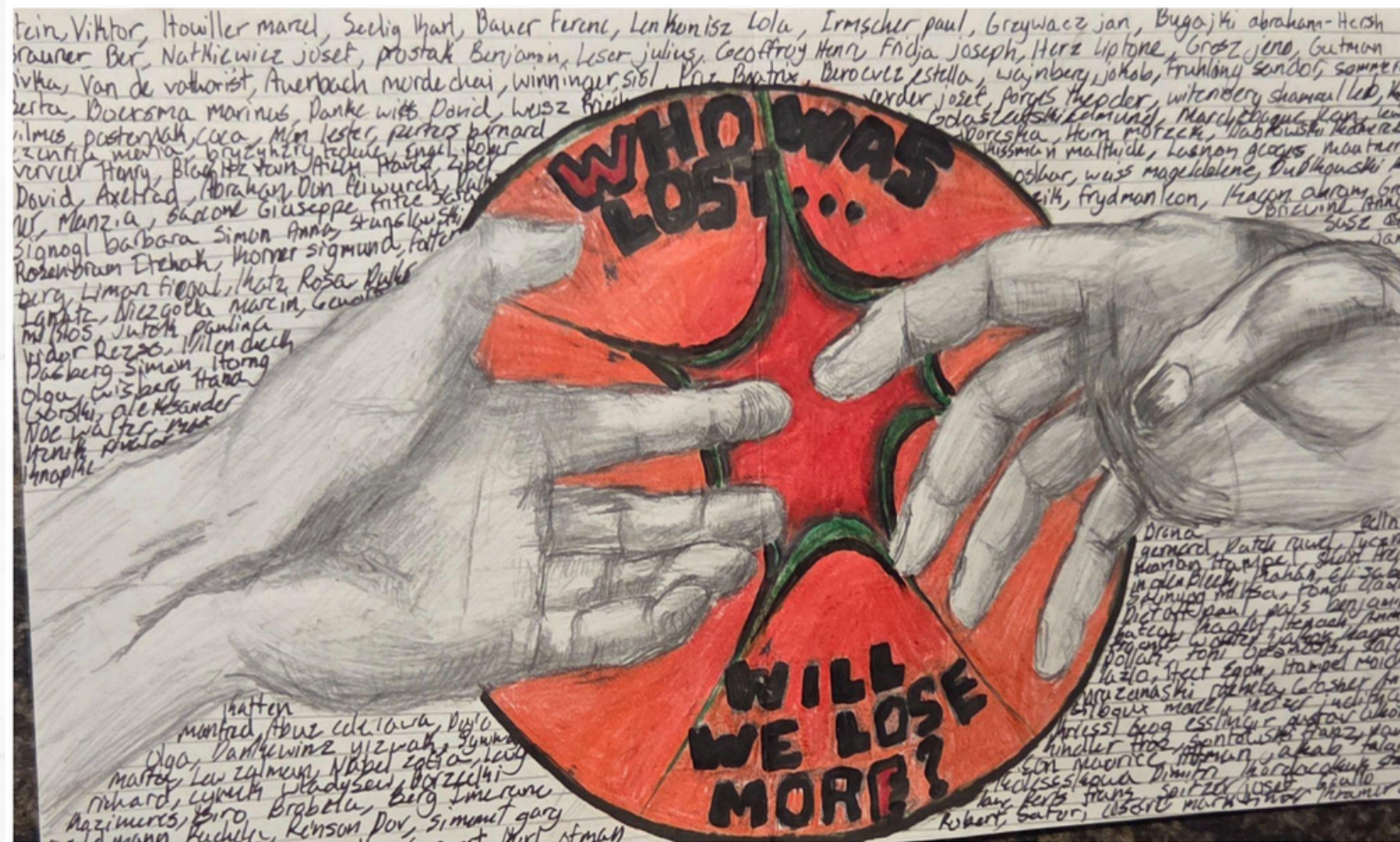
Emma Deyman
Grade 9
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

I made this piece called “Two Tragedies, One Humanity” to show how you can see the patterns and the same behavior through different acts of genocide despite the time periods showing that history of genocide is iterwoven. The binoculars with the Holocaust in the lense looking at the map of Rwanda represent how you can see the same actions and the same patterns of behavior in two different acts of mass genocide therefore weaving them together as seeing one hateful act against humanity. The cracks across Rwanda although they may not play a significant piece in the art but they symbolize that those cracks will not heal or fade and they will serve as a scar to remind generations of history about hate and its repeated patterns as seen here. The background behind the binoculars is the shape of Rwanda and the cracks going through it also tells a lot about how Rwanda was divided through genocide and that it was in a state of brokenness. The flowers and vines around Rwanda represent that it is still rebuilding and blooming in a sense after what has happened representing regrowth. In the lens of the binoculars you can see the gates to Auschwitz on the left and inside of a concentration camp on the right, this is just showing the harshness of how people were treated that occurred during the acts of the Holocaust. This piece also shows that if we do not learn from our past then we can not be better and different for the future. The viewer of this piece is also looking through the binoculars which has a part in this as a bystander looking through you have the ability to look into these events and learn to see the patterns of humanity and stop it from happening again.

Moments of Loss



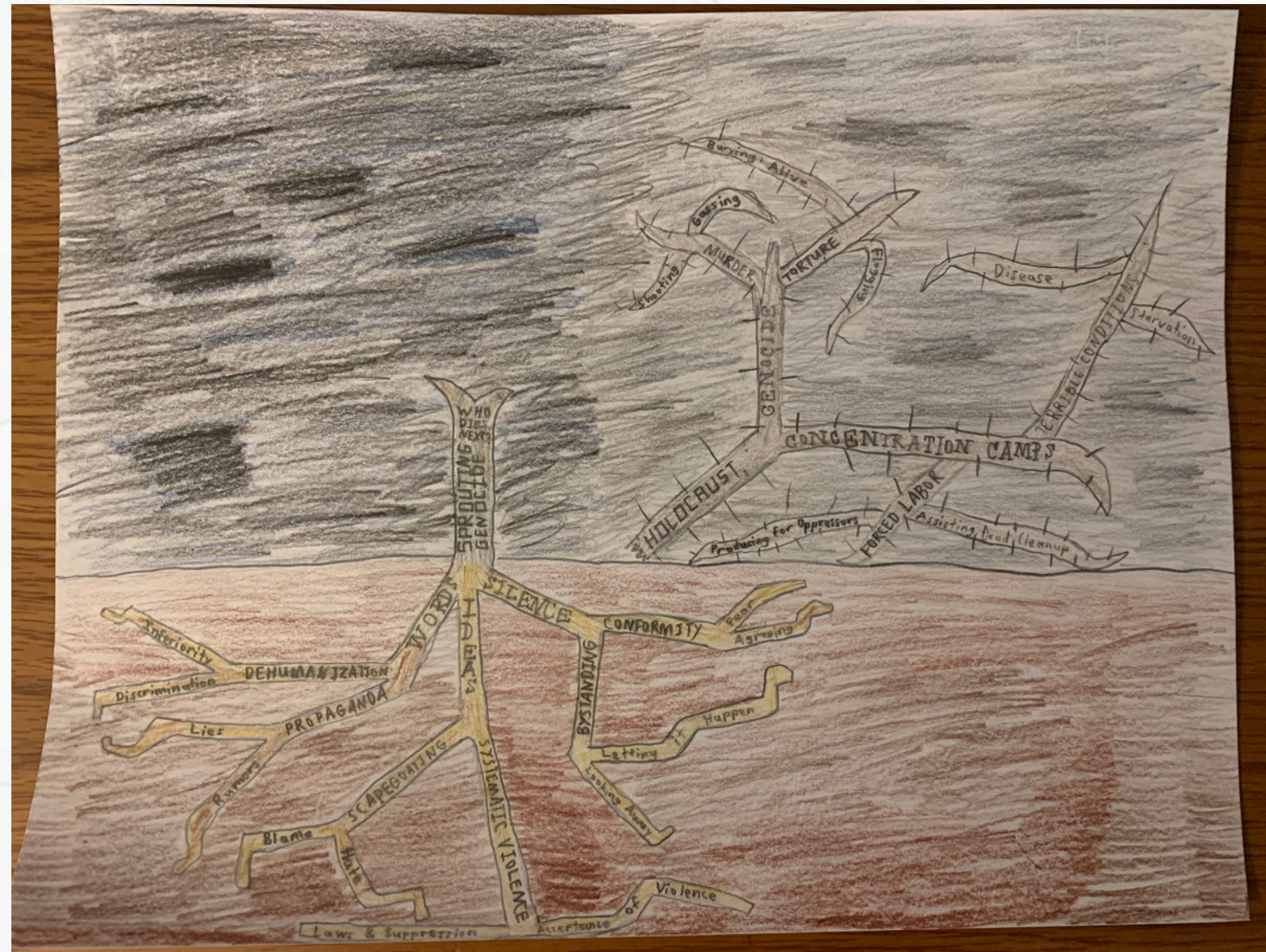
Avvie Nicholes
Grade 9
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

This piece called moments of loss represents people who were separated from their families during the holocaust, armenian genocide, bosnia, rwanda, and gaza mass atrocities. Their last moments with their loved ones, sister, brothers, fathers and mothers had to bear the thought that they were being taken to camp never knowing when, how, or if they would get the chance to see their families again. In the last moments of getting taken away from their families there are no warning signs of what is to come, There is a touch of something they don't want to let go of. An ominous approach and fear of what is going to happen being transported in train cars getting to the camp. This feeling is something that the people who mocked and were indifferent to and could never imagine and wouldn't want to happen to them or their family. The shunning of these moments without the recognition of the pain that encircled them. Wanting to have hope for themself and their loved ones wasn't given but that last touch it replays like the light at the end of tunnel. A forced displacement of the ideas a person has that they want to become collapses in an instant with opportunities all closing like shutting doors in the minds of young believers. When the silent bystanders and people who teach propaganda wrongly represent and not acknowledge what these people lost, painting it as a picture so differently it overshadows the actual stories of people's lives. Erik Hurch was taken away from his family at the age of 13 and they all lost their lives due to the holocaust. Those last moments with his family are all intertwined with the many stories of those who survived and those who lost their lives to genocide if we are all indifferent to the future actions of genocide with there be more ?

The Roots Still Remain



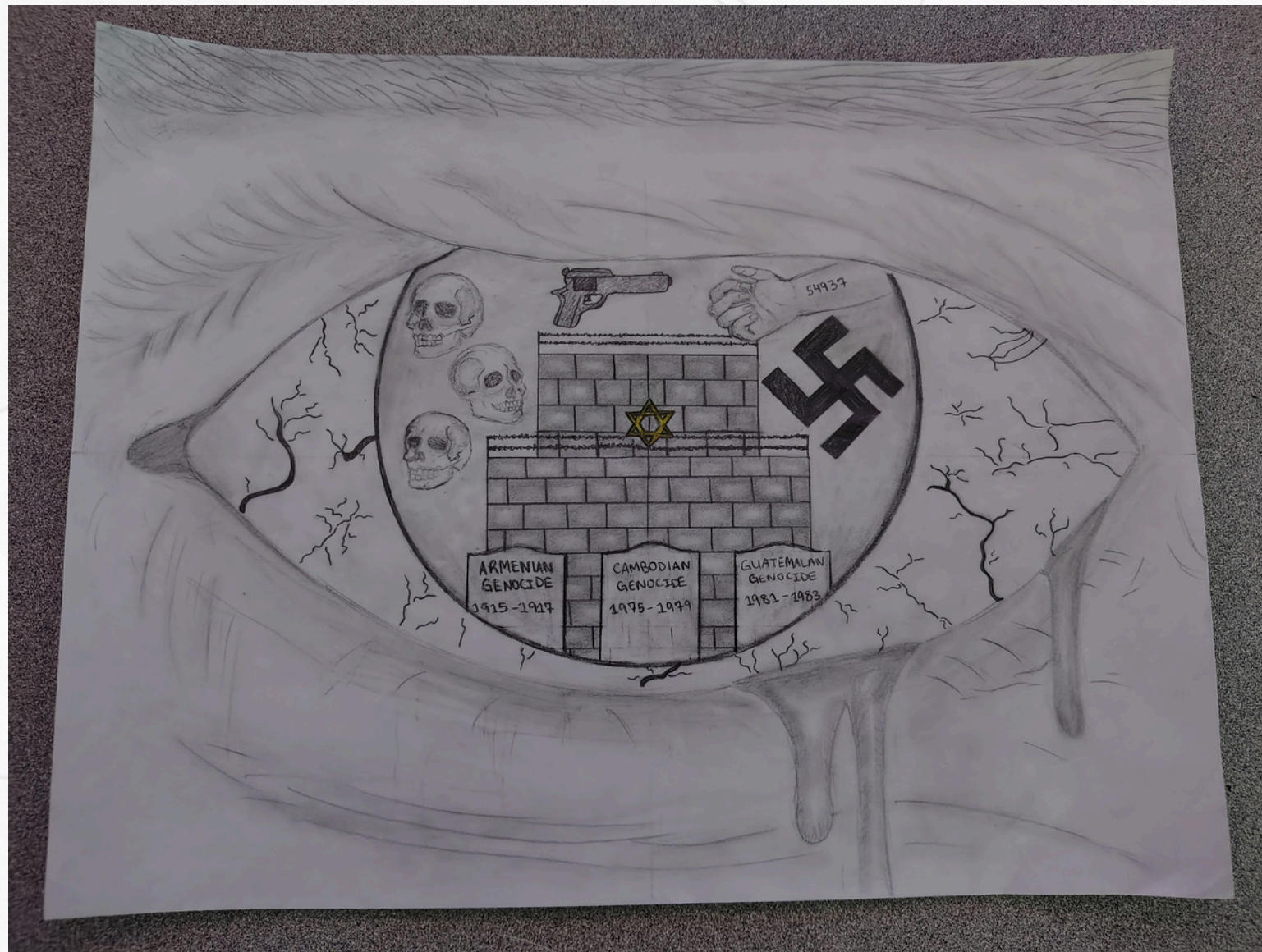
Ethan Haapala
Grade 9
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

I created this art piece, "The Roots Still Remain," to show that even if mass genocides like the Holocaust are stopped or taken down, the roots that started it are still there under the surface. If only what is visible is destroyed, there is always more lurking below the surface. I made the art piece feel bleak and dull to mirror the reality of genocide and the repetition of it. The thornbush represents the Holocaust, and the words show the results of it. The thornbush was cut down and discarded to represent how the Holocaust was stopped, as does the dull coloring. The roots represent the causes of the Holocaust, with three main roots with "Words," "Ideas," and "Silence" written on each. These three main roots show the main reasons that the Holocaust started and continued, with more roots branching off of them to show specifically what made the main points so powerful in starting such a tragic event. The roots are brightly colored to show that they still have life and are growing more evil. The stem sprouting out of the ground with the words "Sprouting Genocide" and "Who Dies Next?" shows that if the roots are not taken out, they will always eventually sprout murder and genocide, no matter how many times the thornbush cut down. I used greens to show new life, and browns to dull it because of how terrible genocide is. The background uses grays and blues to suggest overcast or stormy skies, which adds to the bleakness of the setting, with the roots side of the picture more stormy than the other to show a brewing storm with the start of more mass atrocities. I want this piece to show people that if the root of the problem is not taken care of, and evil words and ideas are allowed to continue and/or be encouraged and people do not speak out against it, harm and death will always follow. This connects to the overall theme of "Interwoven Histories" because it shows that all genocides/mass atrocities all have the same roots: words, ideas, and silence.

Haunting Memories



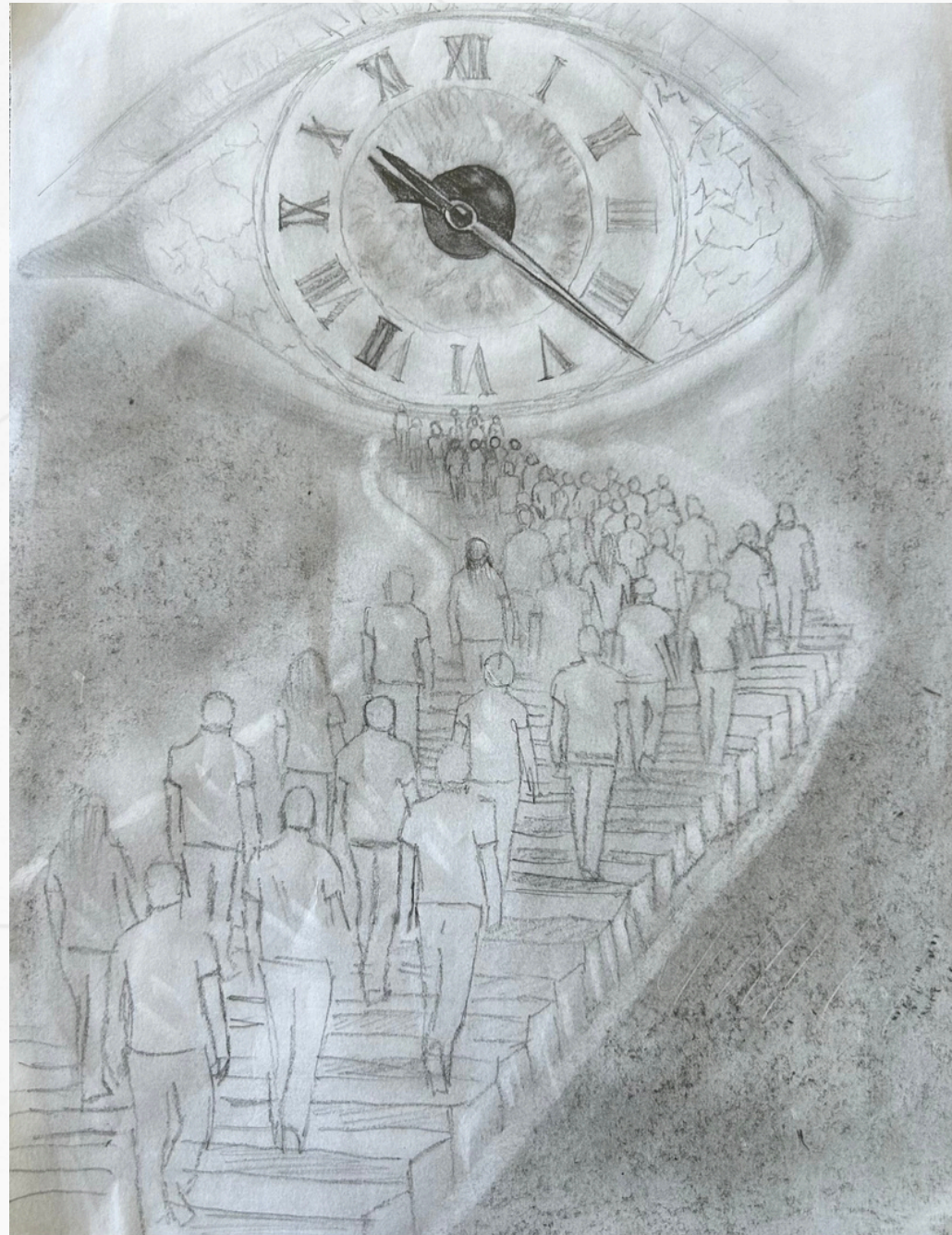
Rayna Lobbezoo
Grade 9
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

My project focuses on the idea of the horrors of the holocaust. This piece is about what Jews and other religions went through and how it connects to other genocides in history. I chose to represent my ideas through an eye, an eye of a person who went through the holocaust. This choice I made was meant to emphasize how haunting the terrors of the holocaust can be. The mood or tone of my piece can best be described as evocative, and soul-stirring. I chose to use no color except for the center of the drawing. This was done because I felt that gray shades express a grave, grim, and dark feeling. The Jewish symbol is the only thing colored in the drawing, and I did this to symbolize a feeling of hope for the victims of the holocaust. My project connects to the theme of Interwoven Histories by showing the fears of the Holocaust and other mass atrocities written on the graves. Although unknown by most people, genocides like the Herero and Nama genocide, Holodomor, and the Indonesian mass killings were related to the Holocaust. I did this to emphasize how many murders occurred during these times. I wanted to show that history does not exist in isolation because history connects in more ways than people often realize. My goal for this piece is to make the audience reflect on what the victims experienced, and to not forget about what happened. I hope my art piece makes others realize how important this tragic event in history is. Everything that happened was caused by hatred and hostility. If the Holocaust is forgotten, things like this could happen again. Each choice I made was meant to emphasize the suffering and losses of this massacre. The central message of my project is that the Jews and other religions went through terrible things and hatred, and that should not be forgotten.

Steps through the eye of history times.



Emilio Sims

Grade 9

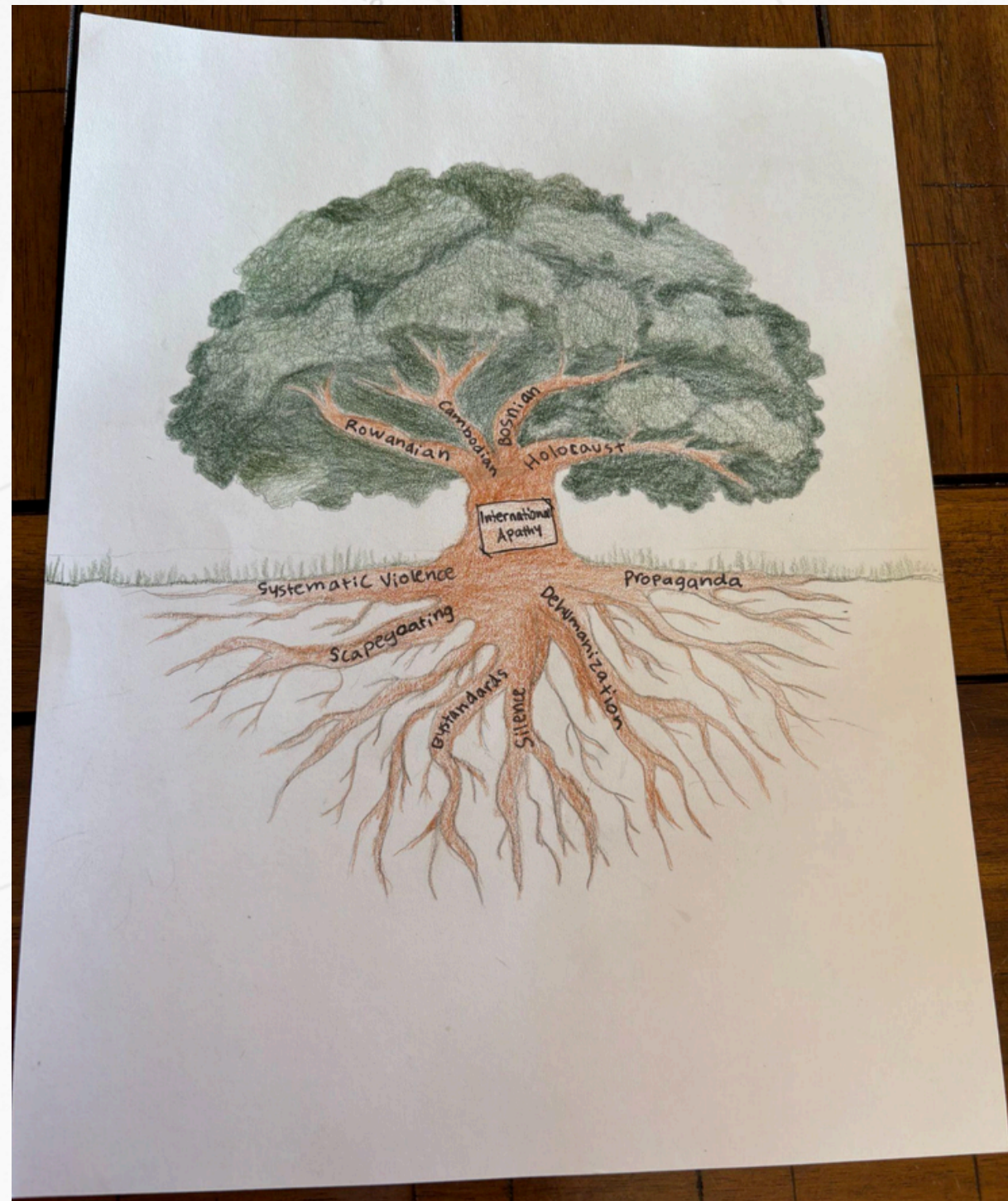
Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

My project focuses on the concept of watching things happen around the world, but it still takes a step that leads to bad conditions. We see these things happening, but continue to walk the steps without stopping to help the people who are targeted. The eye represents what we are seeing around the world; we're looking at the world unfold and stare at our screens to see what they have done, but it never comes. They never stand up, they keep silent, saying there is nothing to talk about, yet there is, it's all the things we look for. Just like the stairs, we continue to walk on, taking the steps that will soon lead to disaster. Taking the steps that we hope won't affect us, they do. They affect everyone in the world, the thought, the feeling, even the noise we hear from the crying people begging for mercy. Yet we stay silent again, waiting to hear the noise, waiting to see what happens, following the same path as others. The clock represents the time that we stay silent. We are the only ones that can cause it, yet the only ones to end it. We need people to quit waiting around. Waiting around has to stop; history needs to stop repeating itself, it needs to be broken, it needs to be put to an end. Follow your own path, take your own step, and show that you want the time to be yours, not others. I want people to notice that there are steps to time, there are steps to seeing, and that their path is the right one. Quit waiting for your screen to show you what is going on in the world; it affects the people who once again beg. Go out and be the change that you want to see for yourself, be happy you made a change, be happy that you made the world better. My piece of art shows the connection between the Holocaust and the many other generations of genocides. Everyone watched things unfold and did nothing about it, thinking that it didn't affect them, but it did. We watched Hitler build an army and thought it was right to blame people unknowingly following the path he thought was right for the future of the world. Creating your own path can help you understand the things that are going on around the world. I say we make the world a better place and quit trying to follow the people who are going to overtake us.

Shared Roots



Rylee Shicks

Grade 9

Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

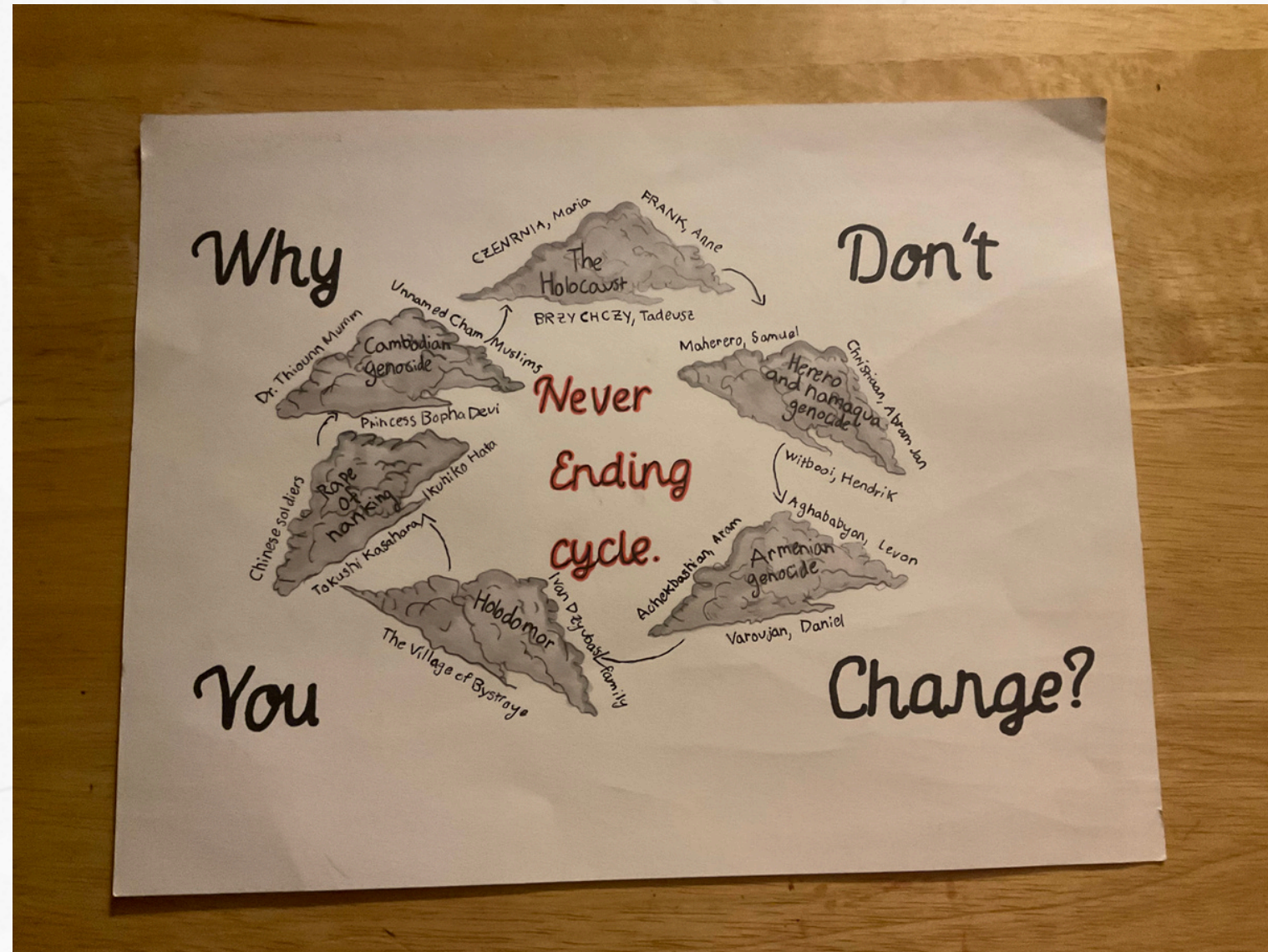
Author Statement

In my project, “Shared Roots”, I chose to show my ideas through a tree to present the idea that all of these genocides in the branches came from the same roots, which are shown as the causations for the genocides above. This is supposed to show the concept that all of these genocides are connected and that they all come from relatively the same reasons, displaying that history is repeating itself over and over, just like a new tree branch growing from an already present one. I chose to make some of the main reasons for the mass genocides the big roots to display that other reasons sprout off of the larger, more prominent ones. In the middle of the tree I did put a sign that says, “International Apathy”. This is to show that because other countries who are not involved take a step back and watch, which further allows the genocides to occur. My goal for this piece is to make the audience aware that these causes are happening everyday and that eventually they can end up turning into something more than just “something that is only happening to someone else”. In reality, we the bystanders that watch these terrible things happen to other people around us in the United States and all around the world are a trigger for these mass genocides, and we can do something about it but we choose not to. Therefore, demonstrating apathy. My project connects to the theme of Interwoven Histories by showing how all of these genocides are linked together to the same “roots” or causes. I want people to understand and identify the vulnerabilities that allowed each tragedy to occur. Only when people do that, then they can see the conditions that foster hatred and make a future where the tree keeps producing branches. Here this links the continuity and “Interwoven Histories” within the genocides together, presenting a cause and an effect to the atrocities.

The Storm Stays The Same

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement



My project shows dark clouds with different types of genocides in each of them, the clouds are going around in a circle. The clouds are going in a circle to represent a cycle. I choose to make it into a cycle because when one thing starts and others keep coming after that it all ends up the same, it shows an endless cycle. I wrote "why don't you change" on my project to show that these things never change, they are just in different fonts. I wrote "never ending cycle" in the middle of the clouds to show that even though the events ended, events in different fonts keep happening showing that the cycle isn't ending. The mood or tone of my piece can be described as "calming sadness", which means it's a peaceful piece with sadness hidden in it. In my piece I wrote names of people who were victims, and different places that people died in next to each of the genocides on my piece, to show the impact of each event and the mark that each one still has on people today. These names on my piece represent the people who went through this endless cycle, and is what brings sadness to my piece. I wanted to show how even though these events ended they still are happening and still have a big impact on the world today. I choose to make dark clouds to give off a stormy effect that shows that the events are like a storm. I made the words "never ending cycle" red because it shows how important those words are. My project connects to the theme of Interwoven Histories by showing the cycle of all different events, and how these events can connect to events happening today and the impact the events still have on the world today.

Kassidy Price
Grade 9
Kenowa Hills High School

History is Built Upon the Same Bricks



Brynn Beyer

Grade 9

Kenowa Hills High School

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

Author Statement

The project I have created called “History is Built Upon the Same Bricks” is a side by side representation of the similarities between the Holocaust and the Cambodia Genocide. I wanted to highlight how quickly history repeats itself again and again and connect the persistent hateful ideologies preserved due to a lack of more action to rid of such ways of thinking. This artwork of mine further emphasizes the idea of how history repeats itself by being black and white, except for the bricks. This symbolizes the idea that even though these are two different events, the fundamentals of these horrific events are one and the same. This represents the lingering stigmas that never truly go away. I am hoping this piece that I have put many hours and hand cramps into creating invokes a sense of calling for justice and a desire to end the stains left from hatred and love one another despite our differences. Life is way too short and precious to spend our days resenting others for not being like us. I want my artwork to challenge the beliefs of others, and to enlighten people about the recurring nature of history and how to prevent such horrors in the future.. And even in the present as well. History is so important, no matter how long ago it has been. Everything comes around eventually, and it is up to the people to stop the negligence of others targeted to abuse from higher powers. The people hold so much more power than the average person seems to realize. This is a call to action for YOU to do just one more thing in order to end prejudice, stop spreading hate, and to simply be just a little kinder every day. If each and every one of us work together, the world will become a better place, and maybe we will stop building with the same old bricks again. It is time to produce some new, peaceful bricks to build with.



2025-2026: Interwoven Histories

The Henry Pestka Art & Poetry Contest

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