

## **2024 Elie Wiesel Competition**

### **Special Commendation, Junior Essay**

Hunter Levelle, 8th Grade

Isle of Wight Academy, James Lidington

### ***The Duality of Truth***

Misinformation has become a large consequence of the technological advances made in recent years. As a result of this, unnecessary actions have occurred against certain ethnicities, political figures, and geographical regions. Some endeavors and allegations have cost people their dignity, reputation, and lives. Unfortunately, reality reveals that most of the time it is only the people who do the research that know the real truth of certain events. Researching to find credible sources that are not opinionated and contain the authenticity of what happened is much more difficult than one would think. It can sometimes be difficult for me to find the exact truth before writing an essay, as I wish for it to be as accurate as possible. Being able to find credible research, define the truth, and find someone to trust with your life can be an extremely challenging endeavor.

Many people have become victims due to widespread misinformation. Attempting to inform people of the truth before a tragic consequence is a cause I would pursue. During the Holocaust, many civilians within the towns were brainwashed by state-controlled radios citing that Jews were inferior and didn't deserve to belong. This is evident in the novel *Night* when Elie is put on the train and shipped to Buchenwald. They passed through many small towns. The workmen of those towns threw bread into the wagons, watching as the starving men fought for these small scraps of bread. The workmen thought it was a game, and that the Jewish people were lower beings, all because of the disinformation they had been fed by the state-controlled media. It is terrible to see people treated like that based on a certain ethnicity that I can relate to.

Although new technologies have advanced to make life more simple than the WWII era, it has also made it more difficult to uncover the truth. With thousands of pieces of information at your fingertips the truth is accessible, but so are falsehoods. A current challenge that America faces revolves around Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the use of Chat GPT. AI does not validate its sources and people aren't validating its output either. AI develops its output by surveying the most common population of data on the internet. This creates a big issue for the future of technology, as people are relying more and more on AI. If we begin to rely on something that puts out misinformation, we will lose touch with the accuracy of information. If AI gets into the wrong hands, it could lead to large amounts of hate speech and opinionated answers based on fiction. The phrase "quality over quantity" is essential when doing this type of research. Similarly, if many articles all have the same views, it can start to convince one that this is the truth when in fact it is not. Articles that have credible research, factual evidence, primary sources with first hand accounting, and are published by notable outlets should be considered the most viable sources of information. Finding the truth can be an extremely difficult and lengthy process, but one worth the sacrifice if it saves even one person from becoming a victim of persecution or hate speech.

Finding someone that I can trust to tell me the truth is difficult, especially when your number of close friends is limited. It is important to surround yourself with people who will always tell you the truth. In fact, I like for my friends to tell me when I'm not right and share their perspective. It is humbling and

rewarding. In the provided example, Hanns built up the courage to trust someone who was on the side of the people who imprisoned him and with one who he had befriended earlier in his childhood. I'm not sure I would have had that same courage. In this situation, it is likely that I would only have trusted my family as guards. I know without any reservations that they would have helped me to escape.

A relatable topic within the past couple of months has been the unresolved conflict between Israel and Hamas. As a Jewish person myself, it was hard not to immediately take a side in the conflict. At the start of the war, many sources stated that Israel was at fault, while others said they were only reacting to the attacks on them. I didn't want to automatically believe that Israel was in the right without doing any research. The only news websites that I even considered investigating were the ones that contained evidence from reporters in the field and bystanders who had witnessed everything. Even if personally witnessed, memory recall may not be clear as the brain likes to forget traumatic events to protect the body. This can also cause a gap in credibility. Many protests and riots have been caused all over the world because people express different opinions in certain situations based on first-hand accounting or what they read. It is important to learn why one has their perspective and seek to understand the source.

In conclusion, trusting someone with your life, finding trustworthy information, and expounding said information can be very demanding. Trusting someone who can inform you of the very things that may decide if you live or not is a tough decision to make. They could either lie to you and have you punished, or they can help you escape the situation to reach reality. Making that choice could quite possibly be the toughest decision you would ever make. Even if it wasn't life or death, finding the actual truth is paramount. There will always be people who contest the real truth, no matter how much evidence you have, or even what you say. Many people believe that the moon landing was a hoax, while it has been proven to be a real event. Finding trustworthy information and factual accounts is by far the most tedious task there is when it comes to defining the truth. With the knowledge of the world at our fingertips, it is only getting harder day by day to find and define the truth before innocent people become victims of fictional reality.