

2025 Elie Wiesel Competition

1st Place Junior Essay

Eliza Van Nest, 8th Grade

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Listen Between the Lines

“There’s a very basic human, non-verbal aspect to our need to make music and use it as part of our human expression. It doesn’t have to do with body movements, it doesn’t have to do with articulation of a language, but with something spiritual.” This quote by the famous composer John Williams describes exactly how art expresses much more than just someone’s feelings. You can look at a painting and see the colors and how they translate into silent expressions of deep emotions. You can listen to a song and feel the symphony bind notes together, creating a sound that tells a serious and emotional story. We can look back at various decades and see the art that was created and how it explains what people were feeling during a certain period. Art explains a specific depth that words can’t convey. So to understand the full depth of the Holocaust, look at the art, listen to the music, read the books, and learn to understand how people of that wretched time witnessed their own life through art.

Many paintings from the years during the Holocaust are filled with dark colors, droopy paint strokes, depressing facial expressions, and silent cries for help that you can hear just from glancing at a canvas. The painting: *Lama Sabachthani* by Morris Kestelman in 1943 shows Jewish men, women, and children in a concentration camp. You can see the dirty atmosphere around them as they raise their hands in despair, begging God to help them. In some corners, you can see sad faces giving up, and giving in.

In the art of music, songs like *Es Brent* (*It’s Burning; Our Town Burns*) was a popular song written by Mordkhai Gebirtig from Kraków. The dramatically played notes on the piano emphasize the words telling the listener to take up arms against the enemy and not just watch the eyesore; but to take a stand for yourself and your people.

The world-famous *Diary of Anne Frank* offers a profound first-hand account of the horror of that time. Through a young girl’s point of view, readers are shown the uglinesses of the world and what Jewish people had to sacrifice for themselves, their family, and their religion. The hatred that the Nazis felt for the Jewish people comes alive in her diary, and it makes the world mourn in harmony for not just Anne but everyone impacted by the war. Frank’s diary continues to resonate across time and generations, serving as a powerful reminder of the power of resilience and the human spirit.

Art is sentiment, it’s joyous laughter, and it is a cry for help. Art is a statement of opinion and religion. The Holocaust proves to the world that if you listen between the lines, read between the notes, and look behind the canvas, you can fully comprehend the tragedy of that period in history.