

2025 Elie Wiesel Competition

2nd Place Junior Essay

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Elie Wiesel

There are countless second hand views about the Holocaust, but when it gets passed from primary to secondary, it loses some accuracy and all emotion. But where can we find a firsthand experience of the Holocaust? For example, Elie Wiesel was the author of the book *Night* which was a retelling of his experiences as a prisoner in a concentration camp. Wiesel was born in Romania 700 miles away from Germany. When he was 4, Adolf Hitler became the leader of Germany. Hitler began to conquer Europe and Wiesel and his family were eventually sent to concentration camps. His mother, younger sister, and father all died in Auschwitz. This illustrates that he had great moral confidence to write a book exposing the evil acts of the Nazis and telling what they did to him. In this essay I will go over Wiesel's impact, the value of primary sources, and why we need to preserve these sources.

Wiesel was one of the major voices to speak out and educate the world about the Holocaust. His first hand experience was recorded in his book *Night*. Furthermore, It educated many people about the terrors that were going on in the camps that the Nazi's had made for the Jews. Some evidence of his impact include his writings as an author, his students as a teacher, and his decision to raise his children with the Jewish faith as a father. This impact has touched millions of Jewish lives with the promise that they will no longer be silenced and the world will know what they had endured. This is significant because without Weisel speaking out, the Holocaust might have been dismissed as a false event or an over exaggeration by many.

While secondary sources about Wiesel can provide more information, they don't share the same impact or emotions as his firsthand account. Secondary sources about Wiesel's life haven't touched nearly as many people's hearts as Wiesel's own book. Secondary sources simply present the facts, but Wiesel elaborates on these events with his own thoughts and feelings. For example, a secondary source says that Wiesel's mother and sister died, Wiesel himself elaborates that he had no idea that he would be seeing his Mother and his sister, Tzipora, for the last time and that he would "Never forget these things even were I condemned to live as long as God himself." (Wiesel 136) Therefore, while secondhand sources tell you about what happened then, first hand accounts can take you there and put yourself in the shoes of the person.

"In the future, there develops a tendency to change these allegations merely to 'propaganda'" -Dwight D. Eisenhower upon viewing the survivors' conditions in a concentration camp. Dwight Eisenhower himself knows that people will often think that if there isn't enough proof, there's no reason to believe it. Wiesel's book documenting his experience is undeniable proof against doubters. For instance, David John Cawdell Irving was an english author who wrote about world war 2, but was found to be a holocaust denier. This shows that people like David Irving are why we need firsthand accounts such as Wiesel's, if the holocaust was made to be believed as "propaganda" the future generations would have no empathy for the survivors and they might even prosecuted them for "lying." This shows preserving these accounts for our future generations is of the utmost importance so survivors who speak out against the injustices will never be silenced again.

Unlike secondary sources, primary sources can be the most impactful pieces of literature to people who suffered through the same injustices. Wiesel's book, a primary source, encouraged around 2 million Jews

who had witnessed the same horrors as he did. Secondly, secondhand sources can show the behind the scenes of everything happening, but to really understand the person's story better, we should read it from their own perspective. Finally, it is important to keep these primary sources in mind to rebuke deniers who often come up with the same propaganda they dismiss things as out of the hatred of their hearts. We always need to preserve the truth and we should do everything in our power to never let it be hidden. It is better to tell your closest friend the truth than to tell lies to a crowd.