

WRITING

Now Is Our Time to Act

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TYPE

MEMOIR
PERSUASIVE

GENRE

GRADE 7

Dear Mr. President,

Middle school is a confusing time. Adolescence is generally messy and has to be an organic process: not always easy or clear. It's only natural that it's that way, and we all come out as young adults in the end, for the most part.

But I firmly believe that adolescence should not include a helping of fear along with everything else it serves. Yes, pushing yourself, taking risks—it's all good stuff, and middle school is a great time to be trying new things. That's not the kind of fear I'm talking about.

The kind of fear I'm talking about is the fear one feels when they hear the words, "This is not a drill. I repeat, this is not a drill," as I did approximately a year ago.

November 8, 2022

The PA system crackles to life, startling us all in the middle of English class and a lecture on some grammar concept or another. “We are going into a lockdown. This is not a drill. I repeat, this is not a drill.”

We all exchange glances. It must be a drill; they’re just testing us. Dutifully, as we’ve rehearsed a million times, we get up and huddle together behind the big teacher’s desk at the back of the room as our instructor turns off the lights, lowers the blinds, and locks the door before joining us on the floor. We press our backs to the wall, the room filling with an unnatural silence that feels taught, a muscle tensed right before the start of the race.

All eyes are on the clock. The second hand ticks, quietly, around and around the face. Sixty seconds. One-twenty. One-eighty. Only a few more minutes to go, we think. Drills generally don’t last longer than five minutes. Two-forty. Three hundred. Three-sixty. Four-twenty. Four-eighty. Five-forty. Six hundred. It’s been ten minutes. Is this a drill?

A slight murmur goes around. “I’m hungry.”

“Why’s this taking so long?”

“At least we get to miss English.”

“What?! English is my favorite.”

The mutters trickle away. All around the school, middle and upper, eight hundred students sit quietly like us. Backs against the wall, lights off, hamstrings cramping from our cooped-up positions. Clueless, confused.

Half an hour ticks by.

This is not a drill. It’s clear now.

Fear . . . it inches through our minds, threatening to permeate the next half hour. We don’t let it. We run through vocabulary lists we’ve memorized. A computer gets passed, hand over hand, to some kids in a corner, unbeknownst to the teacher. In the dim light, we exchange friendly banter, careful not to raise our voices too much.

We ignore the clock, which by now has shown that an hour has passed since this lockdown started.

We don’t know that outside, our school is surrounded by police cars.

We don’t know that a gunshot has just been fired, just a few miles from where we are sitting.

We don't know that a high schooler has just been killed.

We don't know what a bullet can do.

We're just adolescents, navigating through a messy time in our lives.

Another ten minutes, and the teacher has given us a quick look at her phone screen. In the white, glaring light, we learn what we don't know. About the gun, about the shooting at Ingraham High School.

Another ten minutes, and the teacher lets us grab a book to pass the time.

Another ten minutes, and the PA system is alive once again, announcing that the lockdown is over. An explosion of talking ensues.

WHAT just happened?! A gun?! Right here, in Shoreline, Washington?! At Ingraham?! The school our brothers and sisters and teacher's children attend?! The school we pass every day right before we arrive at Lakeside School?!

But mostly: "I'm hungry, confused, and want to go home."

Lunch is served. A lot of people leave: anyone who lives close enough to school that it makes a difference to pick up their kids does so. Soon, all that's left are the students who live on Eastside, who'd get home at the same time, no matter what.

Classes aren't intense; we're all in a haze, just pushing through the next hour or so.

School ends as the clock ticks to 3:25.

We stream out to the buses, blue and green special Metros that'll take us home. We have an hour to kill, so we talk. Talk about how crazy it is, that a kid can have a gun, bring it to school, shoot it, and murder someone, all while ruining their own life.

When we finally arrive, stepping out of the bus and onto the chilly pavement of the bus stop, everything is different. Our obliviousness, to the faraway tragedies in other states, has been shattered. It all comes back to the gun, we realize, and the stupid bullet. If only, we murmur. If only there was no gun. There wouldn't have been a death, a lockdown, an anything except a counselor and a supportive school of a young adolescent with mental health issues.

If only there was no gun.

But there was a gun, there is a gun, and there will be a gun until this great nation gets some sensible gun control passed.

And that, Mr. President, is partly your job. I believe, and I'm sure you agree, that while adolescence is a messy time, and everyone makes bad choices, we all deserve to live to young adulthood. No matter how badly we screw up, we deserve the chance to turn the

page into adulthood. We deserve to go to college. Get a job. Start a family. Follow a dream, orthodox or not. Maybe start a company, find a cure to cancer, invent a time machine.

The possibilities are endless, but shootings in schools shouldn't be. Uvalde, Sandy Hook, Parkland High, Santa Fe High: That is a million endless dreams crushed, shattered with the force of a bullet, the common red and gunmetal-gray thread sewing together schools across the USA, weaving in and out of the media with each passing tragedy.

We need action, and we need it now. We don't need to take away a Second Amendment right, but we do need to make it safe. We need to be performing mental health checks on every member of a family who has close proximity or access to a gun. We need to tighten security on who can buy a gun and who can't; we need more mental health support for students who want to turn to violence.

It sounds like a lot. It is a lot for Republicans and Democrats and everyone in between to write and pass and enact a bill concerning such a hot-button issue. But:

We, as a nation, can come together for our youth. I know that. We'll come together, with our words, our hearts, our minds, because our youth are our future and so much more. We need every single one of them, and we cannot afford to lose even one more child to a gun.

*I cannot pretend to know the pain of people who have lost a classmate, a student, a child, to a bullet. But I do know, Mr. President, that **now is our time to act.***

In the hopes that my words matter,

A student dreaming of a better tomorrow