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Level II Semifinalist

Letter to Jacob Boas concerning his book, *We Are Witnesses: Five Diaries of Teenagers Who Died in the Holocaust*

Dear Mr. Boas,

It is impossible to destroy the weed without yanking out the roots—that's how the Nazis justified carnage. Jews had already endured numerous waves of persecution in Christian Europe, yet there had never been a policy like Hitler's that targeted every single one of them. *We are Witnesses: Five Diaries of Teenagers Who Died in the Holocaust* is unlike anything I've read before. Of course, I knew about the Holocaust, but basically all that information of Jews being persecuted just went through one ear and out the other.

This book, I admit, was a bit time consuming because I had to reread parts to understand the characters and what they struggled through. As I sat down and took the time to read it, I discovered Eva, David, Mishe, Yitzak, and Anne's ambition to make something of themselves. They stood out because they tried to rise above all the hatred by grasping onto hope and humanity. That is something I have never been able to do. I always find myself tangled right in the middle of the hatred, mired in controversy where the more I struggle to prove myself superior, the deeper I sink in—like quicksand.

Even though I have no idea what it feels like to be persecuted, I do know that even the slightest joke about race or ethnicity hurts. My friend and I were walking around, among a crowd of students, examining the projects of different communities when a group of blond girls stared at us and sneered, "Asians." I had a suspicion that the following whispers and giggles were about us. Although it was just one little remark, it still hung and had its effect. I can't imagine what it must've felt like for the Jews during the Holocaust. They weren't even considered humans, and it must've really burned them when the Germans teased and treated them like animals. Thankfully it occurs rarely, but those few times I've experienced racial slurs made me feel embarrassed and ashamed of who I am. The bubbling chagrin and seething resentment would simmer down to the question: why would they say that about someone? The five brave diarists in your book had every right to detest their Jewish heritage, but they didn't let the discrimination get to them. They all had faith that God would bring them out of their peril and bravely hoped until the very end.

Anne Frank's diary taught me that there is always room for improvement. She kept improving herself and taught herself to be a better person. Despite her confinement, Anne was very introspective and set high goals. She even made up her own mottos like "laziness appears attractive, but work gives satisfaction." Even in such brutal times when most people would just sit in a corner and be scared out of their minds, Anne aspired to be a better person. Unlike Anne, if I were even a tad better than somebody, my pride would swell up and go to my head, and I would be content with my achievements—not thinking to strive for more. Reading Anne's diary made me realize that once you stop aiming higher, your life is over.

These five diarists have taught me more than any book has ever taught me. Their story makes me think, yet there is no comfort. This is one of the few books I've read that doesn't have a happy ending but gives the reader satisfaction at the same time. Thank you for publishing their inspiring diaries into a life changing book.

Sincerely,
Pheby Liu