

Honorable Mention

11th-12th Grade

23rd Annual Student Essay Contest | Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum

Both Sides of the Story

Human history is marked by tragedies. It is never the blissful days spent in peace that make it into the history books, but the bloodiest wars and the most lethal plagues - the worst moments of people's lives. That has long been the narrative of the human experience: that suffering is what defines our lives.

This is not, and has never been, the full story. The reason society remembers these tragedies so strongly is because of what they are able to tell us about ourselves. Hardships reveal our true character, our compassion, our determination to overcome. It is only when we are faced with the greatest challenge of our lives that we can truly know how strong we are. As much as society forgets this subsequent part of the story, it is imperative that we always hold on to it.

This message is repeated throughout the Oklahoma City National Memorial video. The video began with the tragedy of the bombing, but ended with tales of humanity and strength. Countless people described how incredible it was to see their community come alive after the bombing and how much hope it gave them.

It is Ryan Whicher who put it best, reminding us that, "that's why the memorialization matters. You can see some of the terrible things, but then you can see all the great things that happened afterwards." Whicher tells us that the most important part of remembering is acknowledging both sides of the story. We can remember the pain and suffering, but not so that we become blind to the humanity and strength that lie just after them.

Everywhere we look, it seems that tragedy has struck, inundating the public with reports of hopelessness and sorrow. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, for example, is one such event that has captured the world's attention. Tragedy occurred, but, as the video reminds us, that was not the end of the story. Civilians - teachers, engineers, parents - rose up to fight for their country. The international community came together to fundraise and donate to the war effort. My own town organized everything from bake sales to clothing drives to help Ukraine.

The war in Ukraine has cost thousands of lives and left thousands of others without their families or homes. It is undoubtedly a story filled with pain, but it is also one that revealed our character and the remarkable ways in which communities support each other. Instead of being only a tragedy that fills us with dread for our futures, the war in Ukraine gives society hope.

And so we must endeavor to rewrite the narrative. We must acknowledge the pain and suffering that tragedy brings, but also remember all the, "great things that happened afterwards." If not for ourselves, then so that future generations will always know that there is hope. So that they will never forget that humanity is full of compassion and determination and strength. So that they will know both sides of the story.