



Americans Against Gun Violence  
7862 Winding Way #151  
Fair Oaks, CA 95628  
(916) 668-4160  
aagunv.org / info@aagunv.org

2023 National High School Essay Contest \$1,000 Award Winner

Chai Turner

Abington High School, Abington, Massachusetts

### **Locked on Emotion**

“Attention students, an intruder is in the math wing. This is just a drill. I repeat. This is just a drill.”

Nervous giggles crowd the classroom as students try to pretend this is a game. Are lockdown drills truly helpful, or do they just permit us to cling to the feeble hope that we are taking some sort of desperate action to protect ourselves while lawmakers accept campaign money from the gun lobby and refuse to enact legislation that would prevent kids from being killed in their classrooms.

But they send “thoughts and prayers” to the surviving friends, families, and teachers of the victims whose tiny bodies are tucked into the caskets and coffins that are lowered into tiny graves. Isn’t it the thought that counts?

Lockdown drills make the threat of gun violence real to those lucky enough to not already be afraid of attending school every day. We students know that as prepared as adults want us to feel, knowing where the nearest exit is won’t help if a gun is pointed at our chests. The extent of an individual’s participation status in said drills feels more of an illusion for some semblance of control than a genuine chance to protect ourselves.

While the Tennessee legislature has been busy trying to expel the Tennessee Three for wanting gun reform and Congress takes no action at all, other countries have been busy making sure kids don’t get shot when they go to school.

After a mass shooting committed with a pump action shotgun and a semi-automatic rifle in the resort town of Port Arthur in 1996, it took the Australian government less than two weeks to agree to completely ban civilian ownership of all such firearms (including so-called “assault rifles”). There had been 13 fatal mass shootings in the 7 years prior to the ban. There were no mass shootings in the 10 years that followed, and the overall rate of gun related deaths dropped to 1/3 the previous rate.

Following a mass shooting committed with handguns at an elementary school in Dunblane, Scotland in 1996, Britain completely banned civilian handgun ownership. Britain already had a ban on automatic and semi-automatic long guns. There hasn't been another school shooting since the handgun ban went into effect, and the rate of gun-related deaths in Britain is currently 1/70<sup>th</sup> the rate in the United States.

America, however, cries for its dead while allowing do-nothing legislators to effectively dig the graves of future gunshot victims.

What stops us from following the examples of Australia and Great Britain? Perhaps it's the false patriotism that glorifies the fraudulent misrepresentation of the Second Amendment. The Second Amendment was adopted 232 years ago in the hope that that the need for a standing army could be obviated by a volunteer militia. This notion was naive at the time, and it's completely obsolete today. Moreover, a musket at the time of the Second Amendment's adoption could be used to fire a maximum of three rounds per minute at low velocity and in an erratic trajectory, whereas modern semi-automatic handguns and rifles can be used to fire up to forty-five rounds per minute faster than the speed of sound and in a straight line. Nevertheless, in the 2008 *Heller* decision, a narrow 5-4 majority of Supreme Court justices bowed to the will of the gun lobby and reversed over two centuries of legal precedent, including four prior Supreme Court opinions and scores of lower court decisions, in ruling for the first time in U.S. history the Second Amendment conferred an individual right to own modern firearms unrelated to service in a "well regulated militia." The late Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger had called this interpretation of the Second Amendment "one of the greatest pieces of fraud" on the American people by special interest groups that he'd ever seen in his lifetime.

More statistics could be used. In 2019 gun violence caused 39,682 deaths in America. One of those was a girl my sibling sat with during lunch, before her father turned the gun on his family. Now, she is remembered as a single dot on a laptop screen. Why is it so hard to connect a five-digit number to the network of grief that makes up the legacy of lost lives?

If this essay sounds too angry- good. I refuse to apologize. "Fury" is too tame a word for what I feel. For what my generation feels. For what parents should feel as they buy bulletproof backpacks for their children who are too young to spell "lockdown drill."

As much as lockdown drills maintain awareness of the threat of school shootings, they tend to obscure the fact that the United States of America is doing a horrendous job of protecting its children and its youth. Discussing the pros and cons of lockdown drills should not divert attention from the fact that urgent and definitive action must be taken to prevent school shootings from occurring in the first place.

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