



Americans Against Gun Violence
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2026 National High School Essay Contest \$1,000 Winner

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I Didn't Think, I Just Ran

The shriek of whistles cut through the lunch time recess, instantly silencing the basketballs bouncing on the blacktop. Teachers appeared in every doorway, their faces tight as they ushered us inside with frantic, hushed commands. I didn't think, I just ran. The nearest door to me belonged to a first-grade classroom. I burst through, my fifth-grade legs feeling clumsy among tiny chairs and colorful alphabet posters. This was not a drill. As police pursued an armed suspect nearby, the muffled sounds of crying filled the room. In the dim light of the classroom, my former teacher became a steady anchor against the sirens wailing in the distance.

For students in the United States, practicing for such a terrifying event is a standard school routine. By the time I graduate in June, I will have participated in lockdown drills nearly a hundred times. It is chilling to realize that for Dr. Michael North, who lost his five year old daughter, Sophie, in the 1996 mass shooting in the Dunblane Primary School in Scotland, the thought of instituting "lockdown" drills as an appropriate response to the tragedy never crossed his mind or the minds of his fellow grieving Dunblane parents.

The Dunblane massacre was committed by a man who legally owned the handguns he used to commit the shooting. Instead of advocating lockdown drills, Dr. North helped lead a successful campaign to completely ban civilian ownership of handguns in Britain. In a keynote address that he delivered to Americans Against Gun Violence members in 2023, Dr. North stated:

The more I learn about lockdown drills in American schools, especially from what I read in the first-hand accounts from students who entered [the 2023] Americans Against Gun Violence high school essay contest, the more upset I am by the thought that as a direct consequence of the dreadful prevalence of gun violence in your country, your children have to endure the constant

I didn't Think, I Just Ran

trauma of lockdown drills in a place that should be all about learning and developing.¹

I see the trauma that Dr. North spoke of in the eyes of my peers during every lockdown drill. We have become experts in hiding, instinctively knowing which corners of the classroom offer the best cover and learning to distinguish the sounds echoing down the hallway. Britain's response was to remove the danger; the United States chooses to make its children live within it.

Britain already had a ban on civilian ownership of so-called "assault rifles" at the time of the Dunblane mass shooting.² Instead of making minor changes concerning existing gun laws, though, within two years of the Dunblane massacre, the British government completed banned handguns.³ There hasn't been a single other school shooting since the ban went into effect. In contrast, American politicians offer "thoughts and prayers" while we memorize the difference between "secure the building" and "active shooter."

Outside the school gates, arguments against adopting British-style laws in our country often involve a misrepresentation of the Second Amendment, including the claim that it incorporated a broad right to private gun ownership that our country's founders inherited from their British ancestors as a result of the 1689 English Declaration of Rights. In his keynote address, Dr. North debunks this claim.⁴ He quotes a British Member of Parliament who was actively involved in enacting the British handgun ban as calling such a claim "preposterous." The 1689 English Declaration of Rights never conferred a widespread, individual right to private gun ownership, and it never came up in debates in Parliament concerning the handgun ban after the Dunblane massacre. This is one of many examples of how groups like the NRA in our country have rewritten history for profit.

I am pursuing a degree in Political Science in order to challenge these "preposterous" misrepresentations of the Second Amendment in our halls of Congress and in our courts. I refuse to let distractions concerning mental health or video games obscure the fact that our lax gun laws and the related vast pool of privately owned guns in our country are the main problem. I am seeking a future as a legislator because I want to protect children like the first-graders who sat trembling beside me under those alphabet posters. Our country's children deserve a desk that is a place of learning, not a shield. Britain proved through its actions and not just through "thoughts and prayers" that it loves its children more than guns. It is long past time for the United States to follow suit.

References

¹ Michael North, "Gun Control in Great Britain After the 1996 Dunblane Primary School Mass Shooting: A Model for the United States," Americans Against Gun Violence Annual Meeting, Sacramento, California, October 21, 2023, 9, <https://aagunv.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Dr.-Norths-Keynote-Address-w-Bills-intro.pdf>.

² North, "Gun Control in Great Britain After the 1996 Dunblane Primary School Mass Shooting: A Model for the United States," 3.

³ North, "Gun Control in Great Britain After the 1996 Dunblane Primary School Mass Shooting: A Model for the United States," 6–7.

⁴ North, "Gun Control in Great Britain After the 1996 Dunblane Primary School Mass Shooting: A Model for the United States," 10.