



Americans Against Gun Violence  
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## **2026 National High School Essay Contest \$100 Winner**

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*Firing Back with Words, Not Bullets:  
An Iowa Student's Demand for Preventative Legislation*

Having grown up in the 2010s, the looming threat of a school shooting has always haunted me. I grew up having to do countless lockdown drills, which produced many a nightmare for my elementary school self. This threat got increasingly real with the Perry High School shooting in 2024, which took place in Iowa, my home state. At a leadership retreat I attended through my local rotary chapter my junior year, I met students from Perry, who shared their traumatic stories with us during seminars. They saw their principal get shot in the head, and watched as his body fell limp, and drained of its blood. These stories touched my heart and made me realize how the trauma from gun violence stains these students' memories and lives forever, but are a simple blip on the collective American conscience. The reasoning for this is the sheer volume of school shootings desensitizing us to the level of violence they create, with gun violence being the number one cause of death of children in the United States.

The attitude on gun violence in other nations is completely different from the United States...as seen in Michael North's keynotes speech:

I'm pleased to say that, despite these views, a determined campaign ensured that changes were made. Within two years of Dunblane the private ownership of handguns was prohibited in Great Britain.<sup>1</sup>

Here, it is clear that the population of the United Kingdom reacted incredibly quickly to the 1996 Dunblane shooting, with private handgun ownership being completely banned as a result of 17 lives lost.

## Firing Back With Words, Not Bullets

Imagine how radically different society would be in the United States if our citizens reacted in the same, assertive and brave manner as the activists in Great Britain.

Imagine how many children's lives would be saved if the United States thought of the Second Amendment less of a civilian right, but more of a well intentioned, yet outdated, artifact of our country 's history that needs to be re-evaluated.

Imagine if parents did not have to receive a call from their child alerting them it would be the last time they would hear their baby alive.

We do not have to “imagine” these things as citizens of the United States. We can see them happening all over the world, in countries where gun violence has been acknowledged as a major issue, and where preventative legislature has been passed. We need to unite together as a nation, to collectively call our local, state, and federal representatives and demand action against gun violence, and specifically private gun ownership, rather than continue to let them distract us with culture wars and ineffective policy. Owning a gun is not worth the lives lost at the firing of their bullets:

Make guns much less obtainable and you will reduce gun violence.<sup>2</sup>

We need to work on banning all hand gun ownership in the US if we truly want our children's lives saved.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> 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, 2, <https://aagunv.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Dr.-Norths-Keynote-Address-w-Bills-intro.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> North, “Gun Control in Great Britain After the 1996 Dunblane Primary School Mass Shooting: A Model for the United States,” 10.