



Americans Against Gun Violence
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2026 National High School Essay Contest \$250 Winner

(Student's name withheld at student's request)

Gray New Gloucester High School, Gray, Maine

Children Over Guns

In eighth grade, no one had to explain to my class what to do when a series of sharp, loud cracking sounds were heard from the classroom across the hall. At first, there were gasps, and all conversations stopped. Wide eyed, we looked at each other, as still as statues at first, then quickly moved from our desks and piled in the corner of the room, just like we had practiced many times before. When we realized that it was only balloons popping from the science class across the hall, no one laughed. We were still frozen, and I remember pressing my hands onto the floor to stop them from trembling. Was this reaction due to the fact that in the United States, over 30,000 people are killed by guns each year? No, we did not even know that at the time. It was much closer to home than that for us. In Oxford, Michigan, a town less twenty miles north of us, a gunman opened fire on a high school six days prior, killing four students. Were we still in a heightened state of anxiety due to this horrifying situation? Absolutely. Is this a normal reaction when hearing balloons pop? Absolutely not.

As Dr. Michael North points out, in Britain, armed guards and lockdown drills were never even considered a thought after the Dunblane Primary School massacre. Meanwhile, "the right to bear arms" has inadvertently caused students in the United States to prepare for horrific acts of violence that should never exist in schools. It forced my class of thirty students to take cover when a science experiment resulted in a series of balloons popping. The fact that practicing active shooter drills or placing armed guards around school entrances were never even considered in Britain, yet is normal practice here, speaks volumes about the need for strict gun control laws.

Children Over Guns

The proof speaks for itself; since the Dunblane shooting, and the enactment of [a complete ban on civilian handgun ownership], the UK has not experienced another school shooting. In the United States, school massacres lead to conversation, debates and outrage, but nothing changes. Some schools have guards, some schools have metal detectors, and all schools prepare the students for the next violent act. The truth is though, no matter how many guards are at the school entrances, or how flawless the lockdown drills are, there will always be loopholes for gun violence. There are situations, such as recess time, or a gym class walking to the soccer field on a nice day, that the preventative precautions will not work for, and, in these situations, gun violence will continue to prevail. How can we fully protect schools? The answer is evident; as Dr. North explains, if we truly love our children, we must love them more than guns. The United States needs laws, not lockdowns. This is not an issue about politics, power, or arguments; this is an issue about protecting children, and with them, our future.