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Where Words Cannot Express

When I was in choir at my high school, there was a saying on one of the banners my director had up. I don't remember the quote verbatim, nor do I remember who the quote was from, yet there is a portion from it that has stuck with me. It was something along the lines of, "music has the power to touch us in ways words cannot express". It is such a simple, yet profound message the more you think about it. Whenever I would sing or hear others perform, I would be touched by this emotion that I can never quite describe. Thinking back on it now, the best words I can put to it would be a purely cathartic experience, yet even that word has its own limits as to what specific emotion is felt. All this to say that there is power in art, not just music. The ability to create or perform something that creates this indescribable feeling is in many ways what truly makes something art.

Art not only evokes those kinds of emotions, but they often can help people describe them to others as well. This is prominent especially during the Holocaust. With a new, terrifying world in front of them, many people were at a loss for words, yet had so many emotions to convey. Especially in the eyes of Jewish children, art became a haven, a translator, a window into their minds and emotions. In order to understand the extent the power of art can have on the mind and soul, especially for the children living through the horrors of the Holocaust, I will dive

into the benefits of art as well as analyzing the real works of art created by children during that time.

Understanding the magnitude of benefits art and art education has on people's emotional and mental health has been an increasingly common topic to discuss. The most prominent aspect is how art provides people a "safe space" or outlet in order to more connect with their emotions. For example, Lewis and Clark Middle School in Montana has developed a program called Creative Courage (Fraga). This program, "helps kids identify and express their emotions" by giving them a space where they are encouraged to work through and better understand their mental health (Fraga). The students do everything from creative journaling to "mood mandelas" in order to create an artistic outlet to express themselves. Artistic expression also promotes creative thinking and, "encourages creativity, growth, and healing" (Ruffa). Healing with art can form in a myriad of ways. One of the most beneficial practices is art therapy; a form of treatment that combines the creative enrichment for people, allowing them to express themselves with psychological practices, allowing for mental understanding and healing (Keselman). Since art does not require the use of words, patients are able to express and process the trauma they have endured without that barrier. From a more scientific and psychological viewpoint, art therapy stimulates the brain in a way that allows the process of trauma to occur more easily (Keselman). However, as to why art specifically has this ability, it may be more simple than most realize. "Mental health is personal" (Fraga), so is art. They complement each other in a way that promotes this kind of healing and recovery to occur.

Now that the extent of benefits art provides, especially to young minds, has been established, it can better be understood what and why children drew the things they did in the

midst of the Holocaust, one of the most horrific events to stain human history. The first example is from a young boy, Vilem Eisner, who was 13 when he died in a concentration camp (image A). It depicts a lesson being given in his barracks. It is rather simple and seems to have been drawn and colored with a variety of mediums, most likely due to his positions and lack of art supplies available. As to why Vilem chose this particular scene to draw, my thoughts are that seeing something like a lecture happening provided him with a sense of normalcy and comfort. He wanted to capture a glimpse of hope and promise in a place that only provided the opposite. It could also have been his way of documenting his life, much like a diary, creating a snapshot of a memory so that he never forgets what he was going through. Regardless, this art was able to provide a sense of distraction and control, while everything around him crumbled. I can only imagine the amount of pain and fear that lies in each sketch mark. Unfortunately, he was never able to see that hopeful tomorrow, yet his art has now been displayed in the Jewish Museum in Prague (Long) and reminds everyone to never forget what he and so many others suffered.



(Image A) (Long)

The second piece is from Malvina Lowova, who was only 12 years old when she was killed (image B). The juxtaposition of the bright colors and rainbow next to the grim scene of Jews being deported while others threaten them with guns and pitchforks is stark, yet can give insight into her state of mind. It shows her disconnection to the situation emotionally, since she more than likely did not have the capacity to fully understand what was happening when she drew this. However, the fact that the deportation is in this piece shows the impact that it had on her; the fact that she was not able to shrug this off and draw something else speaks volumes.



(Image B) (Long)

The scars of the Holocaust will never fully heal. Even as the last survivors of the Holocaust die, we must always remind ourselves to “never forget”. Art is the perfect way to do this. Where words fail, art is there to provide. For so many, this event is indescribable and fills them with emotions that are beyond their vocabulary. However, art will provide a way to express that and put it out into the world. That is the same reason many people found themselves trying to express themselves creatively while in the camps. Whether it is for distraction or expression, art will always be that haven you can come back to.

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