

Free Speech Week Essay Contest: Layne Miller

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Free Speech means that change will always be possible; people's diversity will be protected because they are treated as equals, with the opportunity to express what they believe. Free Speech is essential for effecting change. Free Speech has always been important because it has been used to fight for change throughout history. When we discuss rights today, we must keep in mind that they would not have been possible without Free Speech. Consider a time in history when women were not allowed to vote, and working conditions in mines and other workplaces were appalling and dangerous; Free Speech was critical in changing these conditions.

Through its legislation, the United States vigorously defends the principle of free expression. As a result, the legal framework prohibits the government from restricting its citizens' freedom of expression. The First Amendment recognizes freedom of expression as a fundamental right. It protects citizens from repercussions of their words. It also protects this right from any form of censorship. The First Amendment guarantees freedom from government prohibitions and censorship, but not from other forms of government interference. However, it does not protect restrictions on freedom of expression imposed by private individuals or business organizations. A meaningful discussion about the necessity of free expression in the United States cannot be had without considering the First Amendment.

The term "freedom of expression" refers to the right to state one's beliefs, share information, and ask for changes to be made to craft a better world, alongside other rights guaranteed by the First Amendment. These extra rights include, among other things, the freedoms of assembly, association, petition, and the press. It is critical to comprehend the relationship between other rights and freedom of expression. People have many ways to express themselves, and any restrictions on this freedom are detrimental to this liberty of expression. However, freedom of expression is the essential freedom of expression rights, ranking first among the other requests that comprise the freedom of expression rights. As a result, the government is not permitted to interfere with or restrict one's freedom of expression or expressive rights unless it provides an acceptable explanation for such acts such as hate speech or hate crime motivation.

There is a reason why the Founding Fathers addressed Free Speech first in the Constitution. Because of the repression of these rights, America's history began. The sole purpose of the pilgrims and protestants traveling thousands of miles across the Atlantic ocean was to escape the King of England's oppression. They were weary of not being able to worship and preach about their God and the persecution they faced for doing so. The King had complete control over their lives, and they could not pursue their interests or do whatever they desired.

The Founding Fathers were well aware that the King wielded excessive power over the people, and they worked to combat the King's tyranny. The Founding Fathers decided that they couldn't live in a world where religion and self expression were restricted. Their ideology was intended for all people to be treated equally and have the same rights as they did under the Constitution, such as when they established the Freedom of Expression provision. In this provision an individual's opinion must be given the same opportunity to be heard in order for society to flourish and progress. Citizens' ability to exchange information, ideas, and publicly criticize their government is critical to the country's success. Without these rights and skills, the government can operate furtively, unable to be held accountable for their actions.

The right to free expression entails the ability to speak and the ability to listen to others and allow other points of view to be heard. It's essential to hear other people's points of view in addition to our own in order to bolster awareness and heightened perspective. People nowadays do not want to be on a panel with people with whom they disagree. Instead, society must work towards feeling at ease in the presence of people who disagree with their own values and beliefs; otherwise, nothing will change.

Adlai E. Stevenson, a famous American lawyer, politician, and diplomat, once said, "The sound of ceaseless voices is the price we pay for the right to hear the music of our own opinions." Stevenson is making a comparison between music and the sound of our thoughts. He says music validates and serves as comfort for our views and beliefs. However, this right can only exist by hearing the constant sound of other people's voices contrasting our own. While it is difficult to face a contrast of one's own viewpoints, this aspect is the most crucial aspect of free expression. It may cause friction between people, but it is the best display of liberty.

Freedom of speech is also prevalent throughout not only spoken communication, but written formats as well.

Stephen Chbosky was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on January 25, 1970, to Stephen and Patricia Chbosky. In 1992, he earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Southern California. He has written numerous screenplays and received numerous awards for his film, *The Four Corners of Nowhere* (1995), and many other scripts. However, his most well-known work is the coming-of-age novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, (1999) *Wonder* (2017) for its film adaptation and direction, both of which are based on R.J. Palacio's book of the same name. Chbosky is a vocal supporter of gay rights and is known for his honesty within his art.

When Stephen Chbosky's "Perks of Being a Wallflower" book was banned for explicit content, he explained to concerned parents why he wrote the book, "I try to reach out to them to let them understand that I didn't write this book to appeal to the lowest common denominator. I didn't write this book to be explicit at all," he said, "I wrote this book as a blueprint for healing. I wrote this book to end the silence." He knew that people should choose to read what they want and not be told what they can read and not read. He said, "Banning books gives us silence when we need speech. When we need to listen, it closes our ears. It blinds us when we need to see." Chbosky knew that if people in powerful positions could silence what we wrote about, what we chose to listen to and watch, they were slowly taking away our freedom of expression. Chbosky recognized that removing other people's words removes their ability to communicate with one another.

This can be witnessed when Hitler and the Nazis came to power in Germany, they confiscated all of their people's books. They knew they could control the people if they took away their ability to understand previous knowledge and create new knowledge. In tandem with limiting knowledge and perspective, they incited violence and facism through their public speeches and declarations of bigotry for the Jewish population, showing the danger of unchecked free expression; leading to one of the greatest travesties of our lifetime.

America must never silence its citizens, confiscate their books, or pass laws restricting free speech. There's a chance to improve this country and provide all of its citizens liberty as long as they have the freedom to express themselves.

"Suppressing free speech is a double wrong," Frederick Douglass once said. It violates both the listener's and the speaker's rights." When a government attempts to silence its citizens, it violates their fundamental rights. Everyone has the right to be heard and express their feelings, thoughts, and words. Our society would be unable to evolve and grow without this ability. Injustices will continue to occur unless we can express what is unjust. Stopping the media from communicating with each other is the first step toward communism. When you take away someone's freedom to express themselves, you take away the foundation for all other liberties.

Take, for example, North Korea. North Korea is widely regarded as one of the world's most repressive regimes. Furthermore, the government restricts all civil and political liberties for its citizens, including the right to assemble, associate, and worship. It criminalizes any form of organized political opposition, independent media, civil society, and labor union activity. The government frequently used arbitrary arrest and punishment of criminals, torture in detention, forced labor, and executions to maintain fear and control. In recent years, the government has tightened domestic travel restrictions and prohibited unauthorized cross-border travel with China. It has punished North Koreans who communicate with people in other countries. North Korea keeps its people silent for a reason: because they understand when you stand up for what you believe in, you become empowered.

America will always be unique because we prioritize our freedom above all else. Our Constitution was written to safeguard our rights and liberties. Being an American means having the freedom to live wherever you want, work wherever you want, marry whomever you want, and the freedom to enact change for issues that haven't been given this freedom of expression.. It entails being courageous, proud of our country, and confident in our ability to succeed. Being a citizen of the United States is a privilege, not a right.