



Impact Statement

Yoanna Fortunado, Grade 7

The Diary They Could Not Burn, 2026

Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 20 inches

Philippine High School for the Arts, Los Baños, Philippines

Unsung Hero: Pavel Weiner

History remembers its loudest voices: the generals, the politicians, the proclaimed victors. But sometimes, the most enduring acts of heroism come from the quietest hands. My Unsung Hero is Pavel Weiner, a Jewish boy who lived during one of the darkest times in history. I chose him because when I first read about his story, I could not stop thinking about how someone my age could be so brave. Pavel was only ten years old when he was taken to Theresienstadt, a Nazi concentration camp in what is now the Czech Republic. Even there, surrounded by fear and suffering, he chose to write. He kept secret diaries about everything happening around him, and he never stopped even when it was dangerous. I admire Pavel because he used words the way I use art: to make sense of the world and to hold on to what matters. He was not a soldier or a famous leader. He was just a kid who refused to stay silent, and I think that is one of the bravest things a person can do.

Pavel Weiner was born in 1931 in Brno, Czechoslovakia. In 1942, when he was just ten years old, he and his family were sent to Theresienstadt, a camp the Nazis also used as a propaganda tool. They would put on concerts, theater shows, and art exhibitions there to trick the outside world into thinking prisoners were treated well. But Pavel knew the truth, and he wrote it all down in five secret diaries. He recorded the names of people around him, the things they suffered, the friendships they made, and the small ways they tried to stay human. After the war, Pavel survived and moved to the United States. His diaries were eventually published and became important historical records, giving the world a child's honest account of life inside the camp. Without his writing, those stories and those people might have been completely forgotten. Pavel's diaries did not just record history. They protected the people inside it.

My vision for this artwork is to show Pavel's world inside the concentration camp. It starts with Pavel in the middle, holding a pen and writing. That image is the center of everything because writing was Pavel's most important act. Around him I painted many symbols that represent his story. The theatrical mask on one side represents the fake face the Nazis showed to the world, using staged propaganda and performances to pretend the camp was a normal place. The gas mask on the other side shows the truth hiding behind that lie. Pavel Weiner understood what was going on. The piano keys across the top of the painting together with a piece of bread represent how he tried to learn to play the piano secretly from a man he paid with food scraps. It was one of the things he did to endure what was going on in the camp. Pieces of paper in the background with children's poems and artworks represent how he inspired other kids to enjoy life in the camp through art. On one of Pavel's hands, I painted an eagle, which represents

Nesharim, the group of Jewish boys Pavel belonged to inside Theresienstadt. Being part of that group gave Pavel and the other boys a sense of identity and brotherhood even while they were imprisoned, and the eagle stands for the courage and solidarity they shared with each other. Small human figures on the edge of the pages barely holding on represent the other children who survived, and in the burning ground below, they represent all the lives Pavel was trying to save through his words so they would not be forgotten. At the bottom of the painting is a machine gun surrounded by fire and falling figures. I put it there on purpose, directly below the book, to show that while weapons destroy lives, writing preserves them. I painted everything in acrylics using lots of oranges, reds, and dark browns to show the fire and danger of that time. Pavel himself is painted in darker, calmer colors because even in all that chaos, he stayed focused on what he needed to do.

Working on this project taught me that art is not just about creating something beautiful. It can also be a way of protecting the truth and making sure important stories are not forgotten. Pavel was around my age when he started writing his diaries, and that made his story feel very close to me. It made me realize that even young people can do things that matter and that last. I want to share this painting at our school's arts events at the Philippine High School for the Arts so that other students can learn about Pavel too. I also hope to post about this project on social media so his story can reach more people and inspire them outside our school. As an art student in the Philippine High School for the Arts, I am saving my monthly stipend from the government to launch my first project "*Ipinta mo ang Pangarap mo*" (Paint your dreams) starting from my own small community. I hope that I can also inspire the next generation to preserve our country's culture through arts. Pavel's example will stay with me as I grow as an artist. He showed me that what we choose to document, and preserve is just as important as what we create. Every time I make something from now on, I will remember him and never give up on the things worth remembering.