

My name is Cara Levada and I attend Conant High School in Jaffrey, New Hampshire. It is a small town, 99% Caucasian, where everyone knows everyone else. At Conant, there is an elective offered called Literature of Witness for juniors and seniors. It is mostly based on the events of the Holocaust, but there are other subjects covered. I took this class with the point of view that it would be enlightening, but my main reasons were my friends were in it and it was taught by my favorite teacher. By the end of the class, these two reasons were no longer important. Each day, I looked forward to going because I was learning new things I would take with me into the rest of my life. There were two units that stick out in my mind the most.

The first was a discrimination unit. We learned about Matthew Shepard, the gay college student in Wyoming who was beaten and left to die by two men. They didn't have a reason to hate him other than that he was gay. They didn't even know him at all. We watched "The Laramie Project", and I found it very hard to watch how people think and act just because they don't agree with a person's lifestyle. A common expression among young people these days is "Oh that's so gay!" I used to say it too, but now I think twice. I now realize that saying small things like that dehumanizes people and makes it easy to just not care about different kinds of people. This lesson tied into our work with the Pyramid of Hate.

The Pyramid of Hate starts on the bottom with non-inclusive phrases and jokes and escalates into more serious acts of hate like violence and can eventually lead to genocide or total annihilation of a kind of people, which is what happened in the Holocaust. Hitler and his followers created a genocide of the Jews and Gypsies in

Europe. I never before connected phrases like, “that’s gay” to genocide, but now I can’t forget how one leads to the other.

These lessons and others that I learned in Literature of Witness have changed my life. I am more careful about what I say and do. In fact, my classmates and I even went around our small school to teach others about the Pyramid of Hate. This was not an easy thing for me, as I hate speaking in public, but I knew it was an important message to spread. Now, if I hear someone making a racist joke or comment, I don’t just stand there; I don’t laugh like I used to. I tell them to stop and I tell them why.