

Reflections on the April 5, 2022, online meeting “Stand with Ukraine. Students in Wartime: A Virtual Bridge with Kyiv, Ukraine”



Abstract. Below are the reflections of 11th and 12th grade students of the Collegiate Charter High School of Los Angeles, California, USA about the online meeting "Stand with Ukraine". Students during the war: a virtual bridge with Kyiv, Ukraine" with students and teachers of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Ukraine and Seton Hall University, New Jersey, USA, which took place on April 5, 2022.

***Dieedra Welch, 11th Grade,
Collegiate Charter School of Los Angeles
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2189-8449***

The testimony from the Ukrainian students really helped me gain a better understanding of the situation. Many of the students and professors spoke about how they were alerted about the start of the war and how they felt when they were informed. I remember some people speaking about having to leave their homes early in the morning only to hear missiles fly by.

Hearing them speak about their experiences made me gain a better understanding because it was more personal and detailed. Since it was coming from first-hand experiences, the way the students spoke about the war seemed more genuine and I could further empathize.

Compared to learning about the events in the news where it was more broad and generic. Even though they were in the middle of the war, they said that they were still going to school, which took me back a bit, because it wouldn't be the first thought to continue in my head. However, it was inspiring because they still wanted to continue their education and try to make the best of the situation.

Listening to them just overall made me empathize more with the situation and made it easier for me to relate to their emotions even though I cannot really relate to what they are going through.

I just want to tell them to thank you for sharing.

*Emily Valle, 11th Grade,
Collegiate Charter School of Los Angeles
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0466-7000*

I believe that the most valuable takeaway from this panel was hearing the personal stories of those who are suffering, but also those students who continue to push forward in their life. I understand that this war continues to harm, kill and destroy homes and yet there are students who continue to strive to create the future they decide, and no Russian is going to stop them.

During the panel, we heard stories of those who knew people who went to the front lines in order to serve their community and gave their lives in battle. There are stories of people who had to care for children when their parents were out trying to survive, and there was one story in particular that stood out to me.

The story of the girl watching over the kids in her neighborhood. Most striking was when a young boy asked “Why were the Russians doing this?” Her response of naming this was nothing but an unneeded and unprovoked act of Russian aggression gave me pause. The fact that a young boy who could have been playing minutes before the attack is now forced to hide and wonder why this is happening to him is just disheartening.

On the news, we may see people running away and hiding in fear, but we can’t always assume how they are feeling at the moment, but by hearing the stories of the people who did and are experiencing the effects of the war, we can better understand the emotional impact that it has created on their lives.

By sharing these personal stories, we can gain a better understanding of their lives and how we should react in order to provide some kind of support. These stories help build our empathy.

In the end, I hope the people in the panel feel proud of what they have accomplished, they were brave enough to share their stories which I am sure is very difficult. Through their bravery, they are continuing to pursue their education, while at the same time holding the burden of educating others on the challenges they are facing. I can only imagine what they are enduring and the burdens they are holding.

*Diego Camacho, 12th Grade,
Collegiate Charter School of Los Angeles
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-4056-536X*

The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, following the months-long buildup of Russian military equipment beyond Ukraine's Eastern borders, precipitated into the first major conflict on European soil since the Balkan wars. This event marks a major turning point in modern European history. With Germany remilitarizing, Finland and Sweden shedding their NATO neutrality, and new conversations on the legacy of Helsinki, Kekkonen-like approaches to European security policy, the geo-political consequences of the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine are permanent.

However, such significant, global events tend to overshadow the individuals most affected by them. Often overlooked are the stories of those at their core, the true human cost of history. Among the overlooked are the students of Ukraine who continue to study despite the complete upheaval of ordinary life at the hands of geo-political machinations out of their control. These students encapsulate an adaptability, resilience, and courage unique to their national burden: the territorial defense of their sovereign, democratic state.

Hearing the testimony of Ukrainian students allows international students like us to better understand the gravity of the situation. Each student has a story unique to them that deserves to be heard as much as the news coverage of the battlefield. Their stories humanize their struggle, and remind us that these types of conflicts – once relinquished to the halls of past European history - should never be the norm again.

It is far too easy to desensitize yourself from international violence when it does not occur at your doorstep. Unlike the people of Ukraine, we can choose to live ignorant of these events. We do not have to worry about bombardment, evacuations, air-raids or bomb shelters. We are not forced to choose between military service or continuing our education. This is why individual Ukrainian voices matter, and why events such as the Ukrainian-student panel are absolutely necessary. They connect us to real human beings. We are forced to come to terms with an uncomfortable truth. Every second that this war goes on – as we live our lives, work and study – human beings suffer.

International support may not end the war, but it may very well define it. That type of support starts in us. We are fortunate to hear the stories of Ukrainians, and through technology, witness a sliver of the struggle they endure. Because of that we have a responsibility to support their struggle for freedom, and most importantly, be informed and aware of what is happening.

By hearing Ukrainian students we can support Ukraine!

*Wilfredo Barrea, 11th Grade,
Collegiate Charter School of Los Angeles
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1273-9625*

I think the most valuable takeaway from the panel would be building emotional connections with international students and academics through their shared personal experiences. With the 24-hour news cycle, the ability to get consistent updates about difficult topics, whether it be the situation in Ukraine or gun violence in America can sometimes become numbing. I got desensitized to the international topics as I wasn't the one being bombarded with gunfire or hearing the jets roar by.

I specifically remember hearing a personal story of a student explaining how she had just barely escaped her home when just a few minutes later the jets she fled thundered by. Hearing the student's voice change as she was telling the story and explaining how lucky she was to escape was very eye-opening. It seemed that as she got closer to explaining the part of how she barely escaped her emotion increased and to me that touched me more than any news outlet or blog could ever do.

I feel the news focuses more on the attacks than the people who have been attacked. They will describe how thousands of people have been attacked in Ukraine and skip over these people like they are nothing. They will focus more on the weaponry aspect of the attack, but skim over all of these people's lives? These people have all been through tremendous feats and all deserve a platform like a panel.

Being able to be there and hear these stories firsthand is an experience that I can never forget.