

# 2013 *What Matters?* Competition

## YEAR 9/10 WINNER

Jumaana Abdu, James Ruse Agricultural High School

### *Where Are The Children?*

An ABC foreign correspondent asked a young Syrian boy if he was scared of the air strikes constantly bombarding his home town, Aleppo.

“I removed my heart with my own hands and threw it away. I don’t want this heart. I have become used to not having a heart at all,” said the boy as a thunderous rumble echoed in the distance. “Do you hear the sounds of the planes?”

These are the words of eleven-year-old Ibrahim. It’s shocking at first to think that these words were spoken by a child, at an age of supposed innocence and blissful ignorance. But if you know that only a week before saying this, Ibrahim saw his best friend die in a ballistic missile attack, then it comes as no surprise.

This boy, Ibrahim, is not a child. His youthful essence disappeared with his home, his education and his safety. And the appalling reality is that Ibrahim isn’t the only victim of a stolen childhood. Around the world, thousands of young people see their home destroyed and their families and friends suffering from some sickness, or worse, simply because they can’t find enough food to eat.

And we watch from a distance, commenting on how unfortunate the little orphans on our HD, flat screen TV are. We pity them, saying how sad it is that these people are so isolated from the rest of the world. But isn’t it the Western mass that is isolated? Isn’t it the millions of middle class men and women that are shut out from the real world?

But what is the real world? It is the Somalian mother that had to leave her crying baby on the side of a dirt road so that she could have the strength to take her other five or so children to a place where they can have maybe one meal a day. It is the children in Cambodia who can’t even play a simple game of soccer outside without the fear of maybe losing a leg due to an unexploded landmine. It is Ibrahim, who draws victims, soldiers and blood on spare pieces of paper instead of flowers and soccer balls.

But we turn our faces away from the real world. Ask an average citizen in a developed country what first comes to their minds when you say ‘reality’ and they will probably say something like ‘TV shows’.

And in a country that has the privilege of, not only, educational resources for every child but also selective schools for the gifted and talented, you would think that we would be able to put our heads together and do something. Do something about the reality that is staring us in the face, and that we so blindly ignore.

This is our world, and it is the responsibility of those more fortunate to give boys like Ibrahim a childhood. It is our responsibility to help that Somalian mother who arrived at her destination with only two of her children having survived the journey. It is our responsibility to give those kids in Cambodia a place to live and play as the children they deserve the chance to be.

When we open up the newspaper and see a picture of our favourite sports team on the front page, we ask ourselves, "How are they going this season?"

But when we flip to the back page and we see a picture of the ruins in Aleppo, Syria, there is one vital question we are forgetting to ask, "Where are the children?"

Because, despite the numerous boys and girls present, there are no children left.