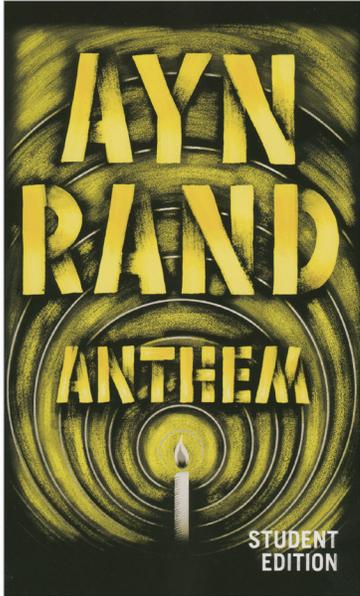


# 2019 ANTHEM WINNING ESSAY 8TH, 9TH AND 10TH GRADE



## FIRST PLACE



**Madeleine Prescott, Saint Cloud, Minnesota – Technical Senior High School, Saint Cloud, Minnesota**

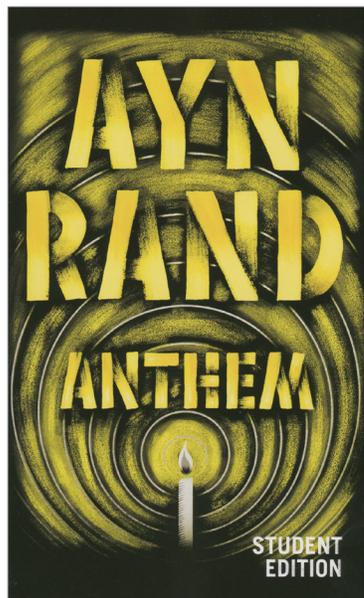
**The old locks and lack of guards in the Palace of Corrective Detention indicate that prisoners never try to escape. Why do you think they do not? In your essay, consider the following excerpt from Ayn Rand’s novel *The Fountainhead*, titled “The Soul of a Collectivist.”**

As a child, one questions everything: “Why do I have to make my bed?” “Why do I need to wear socks?” Although many questions are answered thoughtfully, there comes a time of exasperation when a question’s recipient may simply answer, “because that’s the way it is.” Eventually, one’s desire to inquire dissipates and one may come to accept the seemingly illogical. Ayn Rand’s *Anthem* takes this phenomenon to the extreme. Citizens of her imagined society are socialized to obey the will of the World Council without question and to serve the society over themselves. The Palace of Corrective Detention, used for incarceration within the society, is furnished with old locks and is devoid of guards, for they are not necessary. In Ayn Rand’s *Anthem*, the suppression of free thought and individual desire controls the masses more effectively than physical barriers or force ever could.

In the society of *Anthem*, the way of life forced upon the citizens of the society is designed to be incompatible with free thought and critical thinking. As Equality 7-2521 explains, the hours not spent working are filled with either meals, Social Meetings, where speeches are given by the Councils of different Homes, or Social Recreation, held at the city theatre where “the plays are about toil and how good it is” (27–28). The daily schedule leaves no time for thinking. Furthermore, “The laws say that none among men may be alone, ever and at any time” (17). Constantly surrounded by peers, it would be difficult to develop one’s own thoughts and voice. According to Toohey in *The Soul of a Collectivist*, “suspend reason and . . . anything goes in any manner you wish.” He knows, like the leaders in *Anthem*, that if one can control thought, one can control man. Between work, constant companionship, and propaganda, the circumstances ideal for quiet contemplation never arise, leading to the thoughtless obedience of the citizens.

Unassisted by the ability to think critically, citizens of *Anthem*’s society are taught that the well-being of the group is more important than that of the individual. For example, the word “I” is completely replaced with “we,” enforcing through the language that a person’s worth is found in their identity as part of a collective, rather than as an individual. As Equality explains, “we matter not and it must not matter to us whether we live or die, which is to be as our brothers will it” (66–67). With this ideology, one would not recognize individual needs or desires, and therefore the notion of escaping the Palace, an action that would be performed for the sole benefit of one’s self, is unfathomable. In fact, even Equality, further along on the path of self-discovery than his peers, escapes the Palace for the purpose of gifting his invention to humanity. The doctrine of *Anthem*’s society is so pervasive that

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Equality did not leave because he had been tortured, but because he wished to tell the Council of his invention that he felt would further the human race.

Additionally, fear of wrongdoing influences every decision a member of the society of *Anthem* makes. The fear is ever present, though subconscious for most. Equality, though, detects it in his peers as he says, “a word steals into our mind, as we look upon our brothers, and that word is fear” (46). Equality goes on to describe evidence of this fear, namely the spontaneous crying and night terrors that afflict his peers. The leaders of this society intimidate by entwining their rules into a theology of sorts and demonstrating their dictatorial power. Their ideals are enforced in schools, theatre, and living arrangements, such as the Home of the Students. After Equality commits the Great Transgression of Preference, secretly hoping to be placed as a scholar, he is relieved at the “punishment” he receives when the Council of Vocations appoints him as a street sweeper, and he looks forward to atoning his sin. Toohey describes this type of response in *The Soul of a Collectivist*, by stating, “He’ll be glad to obey—because he can’t trust himself, he feels uncertain, he feels unclean.” The values and rules of *Anthem*’s society are enforced in totality causing the citizens to deem repercussions, such as being detained in the Palace, as just and necessary.

The policies in place within *Anthem* limit the capability of one to think, deny one the ability to recognize one’s self as an individual, and create an environment in which one lives in constant fear of committing a transgression. These policies enable those in power to control the populace without using force. As Toohey says to Peter in *The Soul of a Collectivist*, “It’s the soul, Peter, the soul. Not whips or swords or fire or guns.” Force is not as effective as brainwashing in dominating a society. Instead, in order to ensure submission, dictators must convince the populace that their ideology is the only truth. The “Palace of Corrective Detention” lacks strong locks and guards because the leaders of *Anthem*’s society have succeeded in breaking the soul of each and every person under their jurisdiction.