

The German Federal President's History Competition Results of the 21st history competition 2008/2009 in Germany

Report



The topic of the German History Competition 2008/09

In the framework of the German History Competition 2008/09 young Germans were encouraged to deal with the phenomenon of »heroes«. Due to the experiences of two World Wars the term »hero« is debated intensively in Germany. By choosing a controversial title for the German history competition in 2008/09, the aim was to trigger young people to find and justify their very own definition of the term »hero«, to deal critically

with the »heroic concept« during different phases in history and to examine pictures of heroes carefully – the history competition 2008/09 was therefore announced: »Heroes. Adored – Misunderstood – Forgotten«.

The tasks and challenges

Young Germans until 21 years were asked to take a historical perspective on heroes: Which merits qualify a »true hero«, and which do not? Which differences exist between »typical heroes« in history and today? And how were heroes created and perceived during the time of dictatorships? By choosing the topic of »heroes«, it was evident, that this would be a challenge for the young participants. On one hand, there is an inflation of (supposedly) heroes nowadays, mainly created by media, but on the other hand, heroes seem



to be far away lost in bygone times. As mentioned before, especially in Germany after two World Wars and totalitarian regimes, the connotation of »being a hero« has changed a lot. For the participants, the search of heroes was also a question of identity - which is of utmost importance especially for young people.

The entry topics and the results

Over 6.600 children and students took part and submitted about 1.830 competition entries. The variety of themes covered revolutionary heroes of the 18th century, »silent« heroes during the »Third Reich«, who have helped Jews and other repressed people, but also heroes created by propaganda. Though research was undertaken in almost all areas and fields of society, there were significant contributions dealing with the time of National Socialism: More than 37 percent of all papers (this equals about 2.500 children and youths), have written about German heroes between 1933 and 1945.

The conclusion of all young researchers: We do need people in our society who act as role models. For the participants heroes are responsible, unselfish persons who are willing to make sacrifices for the best of others. Furthermore, the students pointed out who cannot be counted as hero: egocentric people craving for recognition. So being a hero is not a question of fame or physical strength for youngsters, it is rather the question, if they are truly a role model, or not. Summed up, in the German history competition 2008/09 the participants dealt very much with the question of values of civil society.