

Institute for Holocaust Education

News



Omaha Teacher Nationally Recognized

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Jennifer Stastny, a Central High School English teacher in Omaha, Nebraska, was profiled in the 2007 Anti-Defamation League's annual report for her exemplary work in educating high school students about the Holocaust.

"I think what affected me most was hearing Holocaust survivors speak," says Jennifer Stastny, an English teacher in an inner-city school in Omaha, Nebraska. "These are real human beings, it's not just history in a book."

Jennifer traveled to New York and Israel with Echoes and Reflections, the award-winning Holocaust education program developed by the Anti-Defamation League, the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, and Yad Vashem. The experiences inspired her to create a Holocaust literature course for seniors at Central High School. Ninety signed up for the first semester, which began with a trip to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, in the fall of 2007 and moved into the classroom in 2008.

Jennifer wanted to create a course like Echoes and Reflections partly because, she says, "Teens are at a state where they're trying to understand good and evil," and partly because Omaha is a city with a large population of recent refugees from the genocide in Sudan.

Whether the students are Caucasian, African-American, Mexican, Asian, Middle Eastern, Jewish or bi-cultural, "They just devour texts about the Holocaust. Some of the kids have just lived through this. It also helps the other kids understand the Sudanese refugees in their school."

Jennifer claims that as the course has progressed, she has watched her students grow and become more responsible citizens. "I think they've matured about 10 years," she says. "They listen better to each other. They're clearly thinking so hard about every statement that comes out of each other's mouths, whether it's respectful, whether they understand. They feel an obligation to teach other people what they've learned.

"Teaching this class is an opportunity to teach lessons that can help change the world – or at least our little part of it here in Nebraska," Jennifer adds. "The ADL programs have been instrumental in helping me develop the tools and knowledge I have to teach this class."