

## **ADL, Temple Israel help Bridgeport students learn about the Holocaust**

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Last June, through a collaboration with the Connecticut Office of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), 32 eighth grade students from the Read School in Bridgeport, many of whom had once upon a time never heard of the Holocaust, took a trip to the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City.

This special school trip, funded in part by a donation from Temple Israel's Fund for the Teaching of Tolerance and Respect, was the culmination of a semester during which the students completed a unit learning about the Holocaust.

The students, many of whom are themselves no strangers to hatred, bigotry and disadvantage, were exposed to the Holocaust curriculum by their language arts teacher Lisa Farrell, who wanted her students to understand this terrible period in world history as a foundation for comprehending the discrimination, atrocities and genocide that still exist today.

In the fall of 2006, Farrell attended an educational workshop by the Anti-Defamation League, which offers teachers an impactful way to teach about the Holocaust using their new, multimedia curriculum, "Echoes and Reflections." The ADL, a 95-year-old organization which fights Anti-Semitism, bigotry and hatred in all its forms, created this new curriculum to help teachers teach about the Holocaust and what can happen when prejudice and bigotry and lack of intervention win out over human decency. Deeply affected by the workshop, Farrell incorporated it into her teaching plan for her students.

"I firmly believe that students need to be educated about the injustices and cruelties of war and genocide," said Farrell. "Many of my students do not have mentors and friends to advise them. School is a safe place, and the opportunity to become life-long citizens starts here. I want them to make the right choices, not just in eighth grade, but in life."

"I receive many calls from educators each year. Lisa's call was different," explains Marji Lipshez-Shapiro, Connecticut ADL's Education Director. "She shared two dreams: first, to have a Holocaust survivor speak to her students so that they could learn first-hand about the consequences of hatred, and second, to reward her student's hard work studying the Holocaust this year with a trip to the Museum of Jewish Heritage. As a Holocaust educator, I knew I could play a key role in making these dreams realities."

As part of their studies, Rudy Fabian, a Bridgeport Holocaust survivor from the Ukraine, came to speak to them in their classroom in Bridgeport. The students became very connected to Fabian and it helped personalize the lessons they were learning from reading the Pulitzer Prize-winning

graphic novel "Maus: A Survivor's Tale," by Art Spiegelman.

On their visit to the Museum of Jewish Heritage, they met another survivor, 85-year-old Lyubia Abramowitz, who lived in the forests of Russia as a partisan, a young woman with nothing left to lose who chose to fight the Nazis with a rash of cunning and what little gun powder was available. The students took a specially guided tour called "Meeting Hate with Humanity," and learned about Jewish resistance in an exhibit called "Daring to Resist the Holocaust." According to Farrell, her students were intrigued and questioned how something like this could happen.

"Walking through the museum with my group, I got the sense that students really were able to piece together everything they had studied. In order to really make the connection and have the message sink in, people like the Holocaust survivors Rudy Fabian, who they saw in March, and Ms. Abramowitz, the Russian partisan, were essential. I think the whole experience of reading "Maus," and seeing the Holocaust survivors, studying the "Echoes and Reflections" lessons, and then finally being at the museum, hit all of the students differently, on different levels. Some of them believed this was a horrible story, but to see it really happened, to see pictures of real children and people, was completely different. As an educator, I believe this experience is far more meaningful than any test score will ever be.

"The students really did take away the message to respect differences, not hate and to teach others about what happened. Students were able to see that violent acts of hate are happening all over the world on different levels in differing extremes, and that at any time history could repeat itself."

Farrell also helped her students to act upon the lessons about not being a bystander to tragedy and make an impact in their own world. Many completed an additional project in which they worked with Bridgeport kindergarteners, creating their own books which were sent to children in Uganda through a program called "Books of Hope." African children, who have been dislocated in one of the worst humanitarian tragedies in our time, were in turn helped by the Read School students, a lesson Farrell is very proud of.

She said, "The important learning, the things students will take away with them and remember long after they've left Read School, are lessons like these. It is important to learn life lessons and instill core values and morals into students. I plan on teaching this unit again and again, until we all learn what it means to take responsibility for our actions, and the actions of those in our communities."

In thank-you notes the class wrote to ADL and Temple Israel, one student said, "Thank you for giving me the once in a lifetime opportunity to go to the Museum of Jewish Heritage so that we could gain a better understanding of the Holocaust. I learned from the special exhibit on Jewish Resistance that people were actually brave enough to resist the Nazis."