



2017 HOLOCAUST SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM RECIPIENT KIRSTEN DEFAYS

Kirsten Defays is a teacher at Glenforest Secondary School in Brampton, Ontario. As an educator, she believes it is her responsibility to raise informed citizens who will value an inclusive society. To pursue this goal, she takes her students to listen to Holocaust survivors who come to the school. Afterwards, as a reflective activity, she encourages students to compose personal thank-you letters to the speakers. Reading about the Holocaust in a history textbook is one dimensional, she believes. Hearing a live testimony is dynamic.

YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION IN REVIEW

Participation in the 2017 Holocaust Scholarship Program helped Kirsten design a unit on the Holocaust for her grade 11 and 12 students, aged 16 to 18, who are taking courses on Canadian and world studies. The goal of the unit is to offer students exposure to Holocaust-related documents and multimedia resources which are rarely included in contemporary history books. To achieve this goal, the unit incorporates various video testimonies, written first hand accounts of the Holocaust, and images from the Shoah, to name but a few resources. To introduce her students to the topic, Kirsten starts by depicting the flourishing life of Jewish communities in Europe before the Holocaust. To illustrate the lesson, she provides students with various videos portraying Jewish pre-war life. Similarly, her lesson on everyday life in the ghettos includes various videos and photos of Holocaust archives.



ONE OF THE ILLUSTRATIONS THAT KIRSTEN USES IN HER LESSON ON THE NAZI PROPAGANDA. THE IMAGE DEPICTS GERMAN CHILDREN READING AN ANTI-JEWISH PROPAGANDA BOOK TITLED DER GIFTPIILZ ("THE POISONOUS MUSHROOM"). THE GIRL ON THE LEFT HOLDS A COMPANION VOLUME, THE TRANSLATED TITLE OF WHICH IS "TRUST NO FOX." GERMANY, CA. 1938.

In order to give her students the necessary tools to analyse the Holocaust, Kirsten draws upon diverse perspectives. To show her students the critical distinction between victims' and perpetrators' accounts, Kirsten teaches a lesson on the transport of Jews from Riga, from the 11th to the 17th Dec 1941. The lecture is based on the Salitter report and a testimony by Hilde Sherman. The first document consists of a report from one of the perpetrators, and the testimony serves to shed light on the same event, but from the victim's point of view. Kirsten wants her students to note the significant differences in content and language use between the two documents.

Another one of the lessons focuses on anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda. Kirsten believes it is essential to pay particular attention to this topic. The Nazi propaganda machine served several purposes: it mobilized the German population to support the war effort, it motivated those who implemented the mass murder of the European Jews, and secured the acquiescence of millions of others—as bystanders—to mass murders. Through the analysis of Nazi propaganda, Kirsten would like her students to be able to recognize when the vilification of a targeted population takes place in a society and to act upon it.

Kirsten also covered the Holocaust in her French immersion classes. She assigned her grade 12 students the movies "Elle s'appellait Sarah" (Sarah's Key) by Tatiana de Rosnay and "La Rafle" (The Round Up) by Rose Bosch. Both movies focus on the roundup of Jews in France before their deportation to Auschwitz. Students were asked to examine the roles, mindset and conscience of victims, perpetrators and by-standers. Her grade 11 students were assigned "L' Etoile d'Erika" (Erika's Story) by Ruth Vander Zee. The book is a survivor's account of the Holocaust which recalls the difficult decision her parents had to make when, to save her, they threw her out of the train. Students were instructed to put themselves in the shoes of Erika's mother and father writing a journal of their final thoughts. They were then asked to compose a diary of Erika's thoughts as a grown up person.



ILLUSTRATION FROM "ERIKA'S STORY".