



## 2017 HOLOCAUST SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM RECIPIENT MARIO POLISENA

Mario Polisena is a history teacher at Merivale High School in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board where he previously was the head of the Department of History. As an educator, he believes it is his responsibility to transmit the values of diversity and social inclusion to his students.

### YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION IN REVIEW

Mario's participation in the 2017 Holocaust Scholarship Program allowed him to develop the course "The Seeds of the Holocaust Through Imagery" for his Grade 10 pupils. The goal of the course is to introduce students to the theme of German antisemitism prior to the advent of the Second World War. This introduction will expose students to key dates and events by means of primary and secondary documents, with a focus on visual imagery. Mario considers the ability to understand and interpret the meaning of imagery to be crucial for the study of history, as it enables his students to examine the consequences of propaganda.

Mario believes that in order to understand the Holocaust, it is essential to study what led to the Shoah. For this reason, before analysing the Holocaust, he provides his students with an introduction to several topics. These include the history of European antisemitism prior to the 20th century, Jewish European demographics prior to the Shoah, the reality of German-Jewish life prior to the Second World War, German-Jews' contributions to the war effort in the First World War, and some basic components of the Nazi theory of the Aryan Master Race.



**(L) ONE OF THE PHOTOS THAT MARIO USES WHILE TEACHING ABOUT THE JEWISH RESISTANCE.**



**(R) ONE OF THE ANTI-SEMITIC NAZI POSTERS THAT MARIO USES IN HIS CLASS.**

One of the documents Mario introduces to his students is Hitler's speech from June 30, 1939, in which Hitler highlights the reasons for his antisemitism. Mario then demonstrates to his students how various anti-semitic laws, together with the Kristallnacht pogrom, occurred as direct consequences of long standing sentiments that had informed and pervaded statements made by Hitler from the 1920s onwards.

Among the visual imagery that Mario uses in his course are various examples of Nazi anti-semitic propaganda. While the students reflect and analyze the meaning of the imagery, Mario asks his students to consider the following questions: What do the images imply about the Jews' intentions and tactics? Why did the Nazi regime choose these particular images? What were the potential effects of these particular images on the fate of German and European Jews?

Another lesson that Mario developed addresses the Jewish resistance. To teach his students about the Jewish resistance during the Shoah, Mario introduces various ghetto and camp revolts, looking in more detail on the Warsaw Ghetto and Treblinka uprisings. The goal of the lesson is to demonstrate to the students that the Jews were not only the victims during the Shoah, but that they were also active fighters in the resistance.