



2017 HOLOCAUST SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM RECIPIENT MELANIE WILLIAMS

Melanie Williams teaches English, history, religion, and social science at St. Paul Catholic Secondary School in Mississauga, Ontario. She incorporates the Holocaust into the curricula of all her classes. As an educator, Melanie strives to foster in her students a sense of global responsibility.

YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION IN REVIEW

Melanie's participation in the CSYV Holocaust Scholarship Program allowed her to deepen her knowledge of the Holocaust and to refine her pedagogical skills, particularly in regard to how she communicates the lessons of the Shoah to her students, many of whom come from a Polish Catholic background. Melanie has previously addressed Jewish themes with her grade 9 English classes, in which she teaches Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Participation in the Program allowed Melanie to have a clearer concept of the nature of anti-Semitism in Europe, and its origins, which she used to develop a unit of study for her students. Following the completion of the unit, students had a better understanding of the experiences that Jewish people had gone through – the expulsions, pogroms, scapegoating, as well as the segregation and integration of different communities in different parts of Europe – from the Dark Ages through to the Industrial Revolution. This will help them prepare in advance for the topics which are addressed in the grade 10 history class, in which the Holocaust is more thoroughly addressed.



ILLUSTRATION THAT MELANIE USES WHEN ANALYSING THE POEM WITH HER CLASS.

Melanie also developed a lesson "A Load of Shoes" for her grade 10 history and English courses, which she teaches to students aged 15 and 16. During the lesson, students analyze the poem "A Load of Shoes," by Abraham Sutzkever.* The poem evokes the nightmare of the Holocaust through the image of a wagonload of worn shoes which begs the question of the fate of the owners.

Students were instructed to collaborate in groups of 4 to read and analyze the poem before sharing their thoughts with the class. As Melanie's students performed the poem analysis, they were able to make connections with what they had already learned about the Holocaust. Their curiosity during the reading process, as well as their sense of accomplishment at the end of the analysis, demonstrated

how incredibly rewarding the exercise was, both for the students and for Melanie. Students asked Melanie whether any other similar poems or stories existed, which they could then use in order to continue practicing literary analysis. Melanie attributes her students' desire to learn more about the Holocaust, both in her English and history classes, to the difference in the way she approaches the topic. She believes this difference is a result of her experience at the CSYV Holocaust Scholarship Program.

To supplement her students' experience in the unit, Melanie brought her students to participate in the 2018 CSYV Ambassadors for Change Program, which gathers high school students from across Canada to meet with Holocaust survivors in Ottawa. There the students took part in guided group sessions to explore the Holocaust and its relevance today. Participation in the program helps connect the study of the Holocaust to the importance of tolerance and acceptance.

** Abraham Sutzkever was Yiddish poet and Holocaust survivor. Writing poetry helped him survive the war in which he lost his mother and an infant son. To survive, Sutzkever escaped the Vilna ghetto in 1943, and joined a partisan fighters' unit.*