



Religious Studies

Synagogue Visit

In June, pupils from Year 9 enjoyed an insightful and interesting visit to the Belfast Synagogue. The RE Department would like to thank Mr Black for speaking to the pupils about Jewish Life, Worship and the History of Judaism in Northern Ireland.



Publishing success for Kiera

Before Christmas, Kiera McQuaid, entered a medical essay competition for "Mentor Magazine" in which she was tasked with writing an essay from the point of view of a doctor. Her chosen title was, 'A virtuous doctor is the best type of doctor. To what extent do you agree?'. Kiera began with research using medical journals and reflected on her Religious Studies A Level work to complete an impressive piece of writing. We are very proud to announce that Kiera's essay won the competition and has been published in an edition of "Mentor Magazine". Mentor Magazine is a national print and online publication dedicated to applying healthcare students. The magazine contains wider reading to inform and inspire aspiring medical, veterinary, and dental students and their university counterparts.



Kiera is pictured with Principal Robin McLoughlin and Head of Religious Studies Warren Brown.

Bioethics Film Evening

In November, AS & A2 RS pupils attended a Bioethics Film Event organised by @stranbelfast and @UnionTCollege. This was an excellent event with a very engaging question and answer session with experts in the fields of Bioethics, Biomedical Science and Medical Law. The experience provided great support for pupils and teachers.



Kiera McQuaid - a Northern Ireland Regional Ambassador for the Holocaust Educational Trust

My journey with the Holocaust Educational Trust began in March 2021, when I had the opportunity to engage with their flagship 'Lessons from Auschwitz Programme' for Sixth Form students through the Religious Studies department. I was keen to participate as I knew other students from the Academy had taken part and found it a worthwhile opportunity. This programme consisted of three live sessions - one on Pre-War Jewish life, another where we heard the testimony of a Holocaust survivor and a final session to reflect on what we had learnt and how we were going to share this.

This part of the programme is called 'Next Steps' project and is a key tenet of the Trust's philosophy on Holocaust Education as it is important to share what you've learnt with your community, as survivors become frailer and less able to share their testimony. This concept is perhaps best illustrated by the words of Elie Wiesel who wrote, "When you listen to a witness, you become a witness."



We were all given a copy of Elie Wiesel's memoir, 'Night' to help us gain insights into survivors' experiences and I later learnt more about his writings at AmCon 2023. Ordinarily, the programme would also include a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau but due to COVID-19 restrictions, this was unable to take place. However,

the virtual tour which was organised showed us the key sites in the camp like the huts, cattle trailers and the infamous 'Arbeit Macht Frei' gate.

The survivor centred programme, which the Holocaust Educational Trust provides, allowed the educator's



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teaching on pre-war Jewish life to complement and enhance our understanding of the political and social background to survivors, like Eve's story. Eve Kugler was seven years old when Kristallnacht took place, and her story of survival, and that of her family's, is incredible. Her parents survived three concentration camps, and Eve and her older sister were sent to America after living in a series of foster homes. Her younger sister, Lea was hidden first in a Catholic convent and then an isolated farm - they were all reunited in New York in 1946. Eve's advice to get to know others outside of your usual social circle to prevent prejudice has stuck with me since hearing her testimony.

During the final session, we also heard from a Rabbi and took part in a candle lighting ceremony where I also read a poem called 'The Shtetl' written by an anonymous author. Shtetl is a Yiddish word, typically used to denote a small town with a majority Jewish population. Such communities existed across eastern Europe in the pre-war era; all were destroyed in the Holocaust.

For my Next Steps Project, I took a Religious Studies lesson for a group of second year students, focusing on the impact of prejudice and discrimination and antisemitism through history. I also shared Eve Kugler's story with them.

I attended AmCon 2022 online and heard more about contemporary antisemitism and the relevance of the Trust's work today, which I found interesting and engaging. When the opportunity to

apply to be a Regional Ambassador arose, I knew it was the next step up in my journey with the Trust and would enable me to raise awareness of the Holocaust and its contemporary relevance on an even greater scale. I was delighted to be selected as a Regional Ambassador for Northern Ireland in March.

On 22nd March 2023, I attended the first Regional Ambassador training day in London where I met many other young people from across the UK who were also passionate about raising awareness of the Holocaust and its relevance. At this event we heard from a Regional Ambassador alumnus who told us about projects he had organised, gave them some advice for running their own projects and shared stories of the experiences he had had with the Trust.

The most poignant part of the day was hearing from Vera Schaufeld MBE, who came to Britain on the Kindertransport. Her experiences of feeling 'othered' by her teacher before leaving and her difficulties, like an initial language barrier, are just as relevant in our treatment of refugees and other displaced people today. Most importantly, Vera's inspiring story was one of hope and courage, because she went on to be a teacher after leaving school and specialised in teaching other teachers how to help child refugees settle in to school. She emphasised the importance of education for children but said that it wasn't enough to teach young people history, we must teach empathy and understanding. I strongly believe that hearing Vera's testimony will stay with

me forever.

I then attended AmCon 2023 as a Regional Ambassador in person. I met the Chief Rabbi who underlined the importance of Holocaust remembrance, heard from a member of the Second Generation (Michelle Richman, daughter of Zigi Shipper) and heard from many interesting academics such as Philip Spencer who discussed genocide and anti-semitism and Robert Eagle who considered Holocaust literature. I also had the opportunity to take part in workshops around Britain's response to the refugees created by the Holocaust and planning Holocaust Memorial Day commemorations.

This year, the theme for Holocaust Memorial Day is the Fragility of Freedom. This centres around the idea that the freedoms we take for granted each day are simply a few steps from being taken away from us. In terms of the Jewish experience during the Holocaust, the Nazis did not simply send six million Jews to extermination camps to be murdered overnight - Jewish people had their freedoms eroded over years by the Nazis and it's important to recognise that. Another key part of the Holocaust Educational Trust's Programme is the recognition of contemporary relevance of what you learn; my own Next Steps Project focused on the experiences of Uighur Muslims in China. I hope that this year, when commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day, people can focus and reflect on this.