

# Classroom in converted bus helps tell story of mans' inhumanity to man



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Danny Berman brings the Tour For Humanity to students at Holy Cross Catholic Elementary School in Windsor on Tuesday, May 10, 2016.

Sitting a few feet away from the wall of screens with the rhythmic pounding of Nazi jackboots and the close-ups of hollowed faces behind wire fences, it's easy to transport yourself back through the decades while forgetting you're sitting on a bus.

In this mobile classroom you'll also journey through the 20th century's genocides in Rwanda and Yugoslavia, the Soviet famine, the ugliness of race relations and the mistreatment of Canada's First Nations.

It makes for uncomfortable and thought-provoking viewing.

"It's definitely still relevant," said Grade 8 student Renee Wulterkens, who was in one of the six classes from Holy Cross Catholic Elementary School viewing Tuesday's presentations. "It just may not be going on at the same scale."

The Tour For Humanity bus is the creation of The Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre for Holocaust Studies. The bus will be stopping at area Catholic schools through next week.

The 30-seat, high-tech classroom, which cost over \$1 million to create, has been travelling around Ontario for the past two years. However, technical difficulties forced Tuesday's presentations to be moved into the Holy Cross gym.

The viewing included Canada's own dark period in history as it looked at residential Schools, the Chinese head taxes, exclusionary immigration policies and Japanese internment camps.

"I learned a lot beyond what I knew about the Holocaust," said Grade 8 student Natalie Lutfallah. "I knew about the (German) camps. I didn't know about the (internment) camps in Canada for the Japanese. I was very uninformed about a lot of this."

Students were particularly surprised about the Canadian government's decision to turn away 907 Jewish refugees on the German ocean liner the SS St. Louis in 1939. The ship returned to Europe and a quarter of the Jewish passengers ended up perishing in the death camps.



"It shows how easy it is for something to start and turn into a big problem worldwide," Wulterkens said.

While the Jewish experience is certainly a staple of the presentations, Danny Berman said unfortunately so many races, religions and nations have been touched by such horrors. Those stories are also touched on and the presentations are updated regularly based on world events.

"Today's presentation mostly focuses on the issues in Canada," Berman said.

"They see Canada as tolerant. There's some surprise at learning it wasn't always like that."

Berman gives three different presentations based on the age of his audience.

For younger students there's a short seminar on who Simon Wiesenthal was (a Holocaust survivor known for his work as a Nazi hunter) along with some interactive activities. The senior elementary grades get Tuesday's presentation on Canada's past as well as the Holocaust.

For high school and post-secondary students, the presentation focuses on history's most significant genocides.

"The main goal is to tie all these events together and see how hate and racism manifests itself in slavery and the Holocaust," Berman said. "These atrocities are all linked."

"The Centre's goal is to educate and encourage students to stop engaging in hate, racism, bullying and anti-Semitism and to promote the values of equality and social justice in democracy."

The presentations wrap up with examples of heroes who stood up to make a difference, ranging from Martin Luther King to Mother Teresa to Helen Keller.

This month's tour of area Catholic schools is the longest one the Wiesenthal Centre has done so far. It was arranged after several members of the board participated in the centre's annual trip to Europe's significant Holocaust-related sites and Israel.

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