

Intro Paragraphs for Living Proof Project

If Helen Keller was right when she said, “the highest result of education is tolerance,” then the Living Proof Project has tremendous value. I started out to find my urban Detroit students a few first-hand accounts of the Holocaust. What we ended up creating, with Centropa’s help, was a cultural exchange between my students in Detroit and teens in Belgrade and Vilnius – experiences that changed my students forever.

In The Living Proof Project my 120 7th grade students viewed Centropa films about three different Holocaust experiences, learning about 20th century history through the personal stories of survivors. They had lots of questions for these survivors so we wrote them up and sent them to students in the survivors’ hometown, Belgrade or Vilnius. The Serbian and Lithuanian teens translated the questions, interviewing the survivor in person using my students’ questions. They translated the responses into English and sent them to Detroit. Students on both sides also took part in various mini-projects designed to teach about their cities (such as student-made videos), show their appreciation for the survivors’ willingness to be interviewed, or promote tolerance across borders and nationalities.

As a subject matter, the Holocaust can be overwhelming for students, who often feel powerless in the face of the evil they see in those events. This project gave my students a way to do something in response to prejudice they studied, to break down intolerance by stepping outside of their comfort zones and showing their work to students and teachers they never met, in other cultures. My students now see their education as a tool that enables them to make a difference, not only in their community but also in the world. The Living Proof Project isn’t about schoolwork or grades. It is about connections. And connections between people make tolerance possible, the path to “the highest result of education.”