

# *Be the light in the darkness*

Plymouth High School for Girls has a long-standing relationship with the Holocaust Educational Trust. Many PHSG students have taken part in the Holocaust Educational Trust's programmes, become Ambassadors for the Trust and have shared their experiences in our school. Holocaust remembrance is important to us at PHSG, therefore we will be marking Holocaust Memorial Day 2021 on the morning of 27th January to remember the six million Jewish men, women and children who were murdered. All tutor groups will receive a PowerPoint presentation explaining more about Holocaust Memorial Day. The presentation will include stories from Holocaust survivors and prompts to encourage discussion on the different forms light and darkness can take.

## ***Be the light in the darkness* is the theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2021.**

We learn about the Holocaust in our History lessons at school and I am sure I speak for many of us when I say that the Holocaust is a difficult period of History to learn about and understand. As part of Generation Z, one of the last generations to have the opportunity to hear first-hand from Holocaust survivors, we know our responsibility to stand up and say 'never again'. When these Holocaust survivors are no longer here to tell us their stories, the responsibility to remember and commemorate the Holocaust falls to us; to ensure that the memory of the Holocaust lives on and the horrors of the Holocaust are not forgotten. This is why it is so important for us to mark Holocaust Memorial Day.

### **What is Holocaust Memorial Day?**

Holocaust Memorial Day takes place each year on 27th January, this is the date Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated.

Holocaust Memorial Day is a national day of remembrance and commemoration in the United Kingdom. It is a day dedicated to the remembrance of the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust and the millions of other people killed under Nazi Persecution and in the genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.



*"Together we bear witness for those who endured genocide, and honour the survivors and all those whose lives were changed beyond recognition."* - Holocaust Memorial Day Trust.

### **What does *Be the light in the darkness* mean?**

The darkness represents the depth humanity can sink to. There are different kinds of 'darkness' for example, identity-based persecution, misinformation and denial of justice. 'Being the light' is the way individuals and communities resist that darkness for example, acts of solidarity, rescue and illuminating mistruths. This theme encourages us to reflect and analyse societies during and after genocide.

Every year the Holocaust Educational Trust organises the *Lessons from Auschwitz* Project. Plymouth High has been participating in the *Lessons from Auschwitz* Project for over thirteen years. Miss Tomalin coordinates the programme at PHSG and took part in the project eleven years ago. The educational project consists of four parts: an orientation seminar where participants hear the testimony of a Holocaust survivor and learn about pre-war Jewish life in Europe, a one-day visit to Poland where participants visit the former Nazi concentration and death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, a follow up seminar where participants

reflect on the visit and then the final part of the project, when participants return to their schools and communities to share their reflections on participating. Every year two PHSG students take part in the project, I was one of the students selected to take part in the 2020 *Lessons from Auschwitz* Project, but this was unfortunately cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Earlier this year, Abbie and Farah (Year 13 2020 leavers) took part in the Holocaust Educational Trust's *Belsen 75* project, a commemorative project to mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp by British soldiers. Abbie had also taken part in the *Lessons from Auschwitz* Project in 2019. Abbie and Farah shared their experience of visiting Bergen-Belsen with me:

*"Seeing the mass graves was possibly the hardest point of the day, the reality hits you. The most heart-breaking thing of all, is that nobody knows who lies in which grave."*



On the side of each of the mass graves there is an estimate of how many people are buried in that grave. Abbie and Farah visited a mass grave with an estimated 800 people buried. This was particularly poignant for them as this is roughly the same number as the number of pupils at PHSG. This made them think of the 800 not just as a number, rather 800 people who all have their own stories, families and lives. It is essential for our generation to have this experience and so important that Abbie and Farah can share their experience with me and everyone at PHSG. Abbie and Farah have now become the light in the darkness by learning and passing on their reflections and experiences.

I end this article with a quote from Anne Frank, who died of typhus in Bergen-Belsen just before the liberation of the concentration camp on 15th April 1945. I believe this quote sums up the importance of learning about the Holocaust and why we must not let these events be repeated. We must not forget the darkness of the genocides. We must also remember that there is always light and light can take different forms. In remembering, we will all become a light and ensure that the stories of the survivors and the tragedies of the Holocaust are not forgotten.



*"What is done cannot be undone, but one can prevent it happening again."*

By Zoe Christie 13GRA

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