

Moncton, New Brunswick
January 24, 2005

Times & Transcript canadaeast.com

Woodstock students participate in human rights program

WOODSTOCK - Human rights issues surrounding the Holocaust can often seem dislocated from the lives of 21st century New Brunswickers.

But a group of Woodstock High School students are about to embark on a journey which may help them connect the rule of Nazi Germany to their own backyards.

The Asper Foundation Holocaust and Human Rights Studies program is a 16-to-18-hour course for high school students, which began four years ago in Winnipeg. Students taking the program also have the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C., to visit the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Woodstock High School teacher Richard Blaquiere will be teaching the program outside of the regular curriculum. He says the program is more than a course about the Holocaust.

"I'll look at human rights issues, issues affecting First Nations people and the history of that," explains Blaquiere. "Certainly, we'll be looking at homophobia, because, during the Holocaust, homosexuals were also targeted for the same treatment as the Jews."

Some people believe there has been a genocide perpetrated against aboriginal Canadians, or North Americans, since contact.

"The parallels, I think, are quite amazing actually. If you look at the Indian Act as if it was a racist piece of legislation passed in Nazi Germany in the 1930s, there are some great parallels."

Blaquiere says similarities can be seen through some of the early reserve systems and the concentration camps. He says he'll also be teaching about former prime minister Pierre Trudeau and his social justice agenda.

"Kids get teased because they're different - fat kids get teased because they're different, special needs kids get teased, kids who may not fit some people's idea of what masculine and feminine is supposed to be get teased

"The Holocaust was about hatred, an irrational hatred of Jews because of who they were," says Blaquiere.

Blaquiere says the idea of the program is to get kids to stand up and speak out for people who are being persecuted or oppressed, even if they are different in colour, religion and sexual orientation.

Blaquiere said the 18 hours of training will be completed in Woodstock before leaving for Washington on May 13.

More than 1,000 students across Canada have participated in this program in the last four years. Woodstock is the only high school in New Brunswick participating in the program - Bugle - Observer