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Students moved by play based on Holocaust survivor testimony

by MENACHEM REPHUN



Manhattan Day School students attended a performance this week of “We Will Carry the Word,” a play about the Holocaust at Wagner College

Eighth grade students from Manhattan Day School received a new perspective on the Holocaust this week, thanks to a Wagner College performance of “We Will Carry the Word,” an original play featuring monologues from local Holocaust survivors.

Lori R. Weintrob, director of Wagner College’s Holocaust Education Center, said in a statement that the performance was especially timely, given the “escalating distrust and hate crimes in our nation.”

“It is urgent to promote empathy between students of all faiths and a shared commitment to not be bystanders,” Weintrob said. “We’re thrilled to see that our work is drawing the attention of students and organizations outside Staten Island.”

With a rehearsal process guided by Wagner College Professor of Theater Theresa McCarthy, the performance was the result of semester-long research of the Holocaust using eyewitness survivor testimony. The voices of individual survivors were articulated by the performers utilizing testimony from the Shoah Foundation as well.

“Because these survivors are real people, I want to honor their true expressive testimony,” McCarthy said, noting that students based their performances on close study of their subjects’ video interviews, including accent, inflection, and speech tempo.

The performance also marked the initiation of a partnership between Manhattan Day School and Wagner College, who are pooling their resources to improve student education about the Holocaust.

The hard work invested in the performance was certainly rewarded, based on the response of the students who attended.

“I thought it was a powerful way to convey the message of the Holocaust, not to be a bystander, and to learn from history,” MDS student Rachel Halpern said. “Not just to tell the story and tell the facts but to really show it with the accents, with the acting.”

Wagner student Ruth Kupperberg said the play is “about the power of hate ... how it can grow into something uncontrollable and unimaginable if you don’t control it and stop it. It’s all about learning to stand up and speak out because we don’t want to have more occurrences of more situations like this in the future.”