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## MDS students attend performance of 'We Will Carry the Word'

### *The performance featured monologues of local Holocaust survivors*

The eighth grade students at Manhattan Day School traveled to Staten Island to see the original Holocaust play, *We Will Carry the Word*, performed by the students of Wagner College. The performance featured monologues of local Holocaust survivors.

"It was so important for our students to hear their stories and learn about the Holocaust from another perspective," says Judy Melzer, Associate Principal and Director of the Holocaust curriculum at MDS.

The Wagner faculty and students were equally excited to have the eighth graders attend the show.

"At a moment of 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," says Lori R. Weintrob, director of the Holocaust Education Center at Wagner College. "We're thrilled to see that our work is drawing the attention of students and organizations outside Staten Island."

Attending the performance marked the beginning of a unique partnership between Manhattan Day School and Wagner College. The two schools have decided to pool their resources in the area of Holocaust study in order to expand their collections of survivor interviews, increase the visibility of their Holocaust study programs, and provide students with a more global view of this period of history. It is a step by both institutions to make their commitment to Holocaust study even stronger.

The presentation is the culmination of a semester of research and study of the Holocaust using survivor eyewitness testimony. In a rehearsal process guided by Theresa McCarthy, Professor of Theater at Wagner College, students came to embody and give voice to an individual Holocaust survivor from testimony drawn primarily from the archives of the Shoah Foundation. McCarthy explored with students techniques for creating character that are the opposite of traditional method acting, with its emphasis on psychological analysis of character's desires. Instead the performers were inspired by the work of modernist theatre artist Anna Deveare Smith whose documentary performance works have revolutionized the actor's approach to character.

"Because these survivors are real people, I want to honor their true expressive testimony," says McCarthy. "Students have studied their subjects' video interviews and observed the nuance and details that can be heard their voice, the accent and the inflection; the tempo of their speech and in every gesture. Through this deep study and practice students created a live documentary performance of their survivor". The course was inspired by a joint project of the National Jewish Theater Foundation and the Shoah Foundation entitled "This is What I've Scene." In addition, there are scenes from Tony Kushner's *Bright Room Called Day* and Charlotte Delbo, *Who Will Carry the Word*.

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