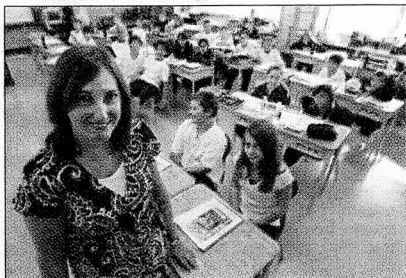


TEACHER OF THE WEEK

She brings special touch to tough subjects

KAREN SEIDMAN
THE GAZETTE



JOHN MAHONEY THE GAZETTE

Solman with her Grade 6 class at Westpark Elementary.

The Holocaust was always a difficult topic for Freda Solman to teach to her Grade 6 students at Westpark Elementary School because both of her parents are survivors of the World War II genocide.

Still, when given the opportunity to apply for a scholarship that would allow her to go to the Holocaust memorial in Israel and study the subject in a very profound way, Solman didn't hesitate.

"It was a very difficult place to be, but I wanted to be better able to answer the kids' questions," said Solman, who won the Thomas and Riva Hecht scholarship two years ago to take a course on teaching the Holocaust, the first recipient in Quebec for the newly-established scholarship along with her colleague at the Dollard des Ormeaux school, Carole Touchette.

"I had been teaching the Holocaust but not to the same extent as I did after the program," she said. "It really enabled me to be able to add a layer of depth to the program."

She found the intensive three-week program was sometimes difficult.

"It was like reliving my parents' lives," said Solman, who met teachers from all over the world at the program. "But it really allowed us to learn more about the Holocaust, to understand what went on so that we could feel better prepared since it's not an

Teacher of the Week

Teacher of the Week is a new weekly feature spotlighting a local educator.

Name: Freda Solman

School: Westpark elementary in Dollard des Ormeaux

Grade: 6

Years of experience: 31

Extracurricular activities: Walking, listening to music, spending time with family

Hobbies: She hopes to paint and play piano when she retires

Most recently read book: The Last Lecture

easy topic to talk about."

Her principal, Mary Anne Bindner, described Solman as a "truly outstanding" teacher who has given conferences to other teachers about teaching the Holocaust.

"She really is a fantastic

teacher," said Bindner.

Solman hasn't gone the extra distance just to teach the Holocaust to her students; she believes in immersing herself in a subject and equipping herself with as much information as possible to be the best

teacher possible. For example, she spent a few days during each of the last two summers at a literacy camp because she wanted to find new ways to get her students reading, writing and speaking.

"I've become more and more interested in literacy," said Solman, who believes she learned so much about teaching language arts in workshops at the camp. "I really came back rejuvenated and full of ideas."

It was her instructors at literacy camp who inspired her to finally be brave enough to use poetry in her class and she's been really pleased with the results.

She had the students select poems related to a specific theme each month and then recite them. The students voted on the ones they liked best and Solman compiled the poems in a booklet.

She also had them do nonsense poems to let them have a little fun with language.

Solman is on the planning committee of Springboards, a network of English Language Arts teachers in Quebec. She also works with special needs students at Westpark, and had worked for many years at the Mackay Centre.

"I have a real bond with my special-needs students," she said. "I really get to know them well and become an advocate for them. It's very special."

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NOMINATE A TEACHER

Do you know a teacher who should be honoured for going that extra little bit? Go to our website, click on this story and add your suggestion. Or, drop us a line at teacheroftheweek@thegazette.canwest.com Send us a photo.

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