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Artful history

Living Voices presentation documents life of Anne Frank for students

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School principal Chris Hammons put 12 million lives into perspective for his eighth-grade students Wednesday.

Hammons said 20 Seahawk stadiums filled with people equals one million. Now multiply that by 12. That's how many innocent lives were taken at the hands of the Nazis during World War II.

"It's incomprehensible," Hammons said.

Eighth-grade students at all three middle schools were treated to a very special, educational and very emotional performance Wednesday by Katjana Vadeboncoeur, a professional actor who works for Living Voices of Seattle. Living Voices has made presentations in Coeur d'Alene schools before, bringing its chautauqua of various historical characters. Vadeboncoeur portrayed a character named Sarah, who was based on several friends of Anne Frank, in "Through The Eyes of a Friend." The presentation is a segue to the

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next English unit for the kids, but also a valuable **history** lesson.

"Hitler and the Nazis weren't talking about killing Jews in 1933 - they were promising a strong, new Germany," Vadeboncoeur said. "You were considered to be an enemy (if you were Jewish)."

In 1933, Otto Frank made the decision to move to his family to Holland after the Nazis gained power in Germany. Young Anne was only 11 when the Nazis invaded Holland. Vadeboncoeur showed the students the Star of David badges the Jews were required to wear on the left side over their heart, "like a target."

The Frank family went into hiding, she said, when Anne's older sister, Margo, received a letter to report to a "work camp," which are now known to be concentration camps. The Franks and one other family, eight people in all, stayed in two rooms above Otto Frank's office for two years before they were found, arrested and sent to concentration camps.

Vadeboncoeur's performance was a movie and a play put together. As Sarah, she spoke to Anne, whose image was shown on screen, with recordings of Anne speaking to her. Sarah and Anne are best friends, both living in Holland. Sarah, too, ends up in hiding for two years, and she and Anne meet up again at Aushwitz.

The horrors of the concentration camp are presented through the eyes of these young girls, who were the same age as the girls in the middle school audiences. The accompanying film footage, although not extremely graphic, was disturbing and profound.

April O'Dell, 13, said she saw the Anne Frank exhibit recently at the Human Rights Education Institute, which sponsored the presentation by Living Voices.

"It's upsetting - it made me cry a little," O'Dell said.

Her classmate, Avalon Leddy, 13, thought Vadeboncoeur's presentation was "really good - informational."

"It really opens your eyes," Leddy said.

Vadeboncoeur said it's hard to relate to the deaths of 12 million people.

"I do know how to relate if it was my best friend," she said.

Sarah survives the concentration camp, as does Otto Frank, who eventually had Anne's diary published for the masses. Anne Frank died of typhus at the age of 15 in Bergen-Belsen, a concentration camp.

Katjana Vadeboncoeur, an actor, director and teaching artist based in Seattle, acts out a scene in the "Living Voices of Anne Frank" as Frank's best friend Sarah during a performance Wednesday at Lakes Middle School.

CAROLINA BYRMO/Press

Infobox

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KATJANA VADEBONCOEUR, actress

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