

Human rights part of broader education

Gray Academy students probe Afghan war

BY SAM THOMPSON

STAFF REPORTER

sam.thompson@canstarnews.com

Alex Dobrota is a Montreal law student, but a few years ago, he spent time in war-torn Afghanistan as a *Globe and Mail* reporter.

Dobrota – along with terrorism expert Daniel Ashrafi, Prof. Richard Gordon, Capt. Dave Muralt of the Armed Forces and representatives of the Afghan community like Dr. Wassay Niazi, Meena Niazi and Ariana Yafti – participated in a day-long human rights conference at Gray Academy of Jewish Education.

“I think this is a great project,” said Dobrota. “The students are very interested and after this they (may) go on to further involvement with these issues.”

The day-long project, in celebration of Raoul Wallenberg Day, is part of an annual tradition at the Tuxedo-area school, where students get the chance to break into small groups to discuss and debate with speakers on a human rights issue.

According to Shelley Faintuch of the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg, Jan. 17 is celebrated in honour of Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat who saved the lives of over 100,000 Jews in Budapest during the Holocaust.

said the story of Wallenberg – who disappeared in 1947 – is a message the students can take to heart.

“They learn that people can make a difference, even in the face of evil,” said Faintuch, “and that there’s a need to respect each other, even if we don’t know each other.”

Faintuch said Afghanistan was chosen for this year’s theme as a way to help students understand Canada’s military presence in that country and to form their own opinions.

“Afghanistan is one of the hot-button political and humanitarian issues on the country’s agenda,” she said.

“By working in smaller breakout groups, the students will be able to question the speakers and get the kind of answers and information they need.”

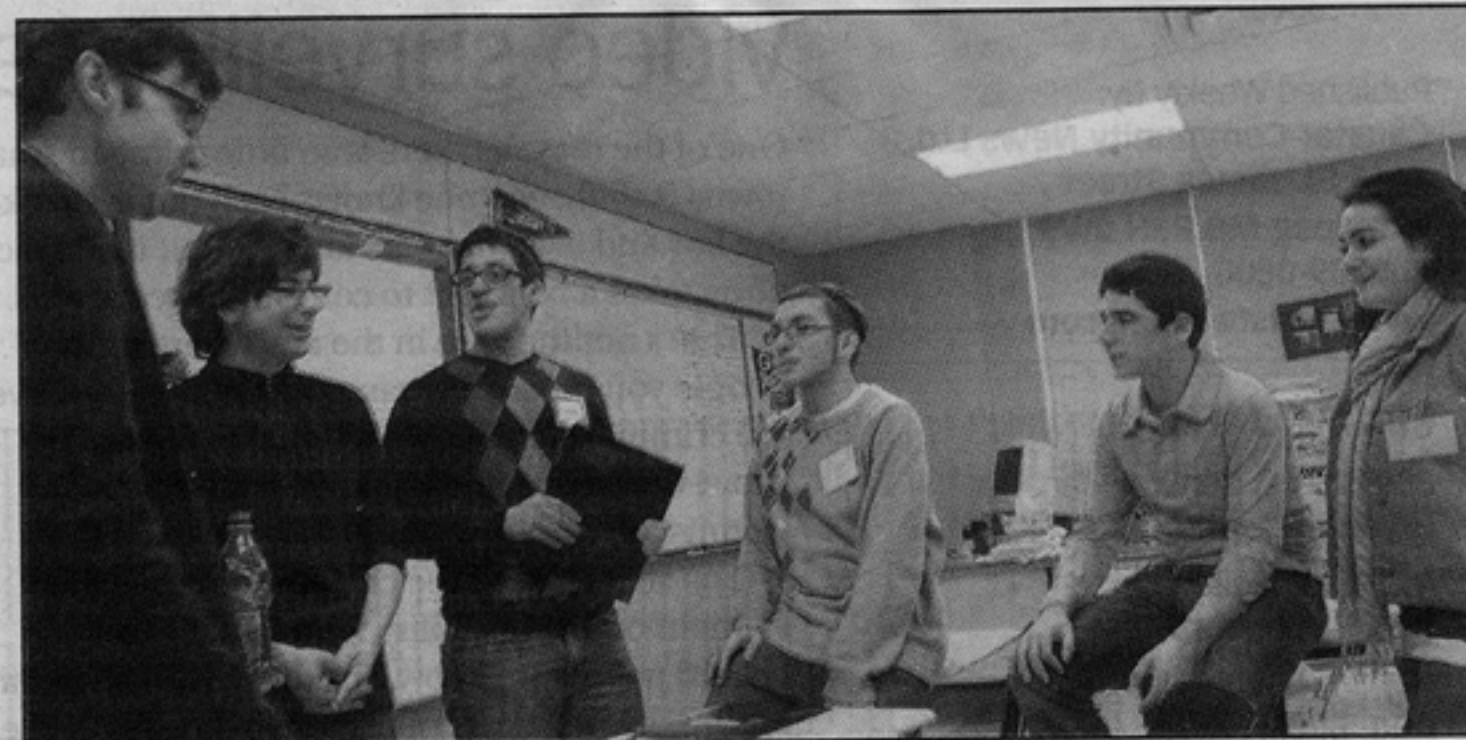
The students, for their part, say the project is a far more effective way of learning about world issues than reading from a textbook.

Student Tali Aziza said part of the project’s appeal is it gives students a chance to determine if – and how – they can contribute to humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan.

“I think part of it relates to what we’ve learned about Judaism,” she said.

“A big part of Judaism is to help other people – it’s important for us to acknowledge what’s going on over there...and it’s so easy for us as students in Canada to take what we have for granted.”

For more local news visit
www.canstarnews.com



Gray Academy students Michael A. Schwartz, David Rubenfeld, Zev Faintuch, Jonah Brown and Tali Aziza, chat with Alex Dobrota (left), a former *Globe and Mail* reporter who spent time in Afghanistan.

Photo by Sam Thompson