

Secondary Assembly. Sharing the Legacy of Hope

Begin with recorded sounds of phones ringing and computer keyboards tapping. All presenters should be on their mobile phones, sharing texts, sending and reading messages. Then switch off the sounds and enjoy the silence before the leader speaks.

Leader

Have you noticed how easy it is to get hold of news these days? We are so good at gathering information. If an event happens somewhere in the world, it can be on our our mobile phones and our computer screens and around the globe in seconds.

Sometimes I am tempted to switch my phone off because I am sent adverts for things I don't want to buy or given news about celebrities I don't really need to hear.

Student A (*challenges the leader*)

But sometimes getting news quickly is important. We are lucky to be able to find things out almost as soon as they happen. Then we can react quickly and let people know what we think.

Student B (*continues the challenge*)

That's true and it's good when we respond to news. Something takes place and within moments people all over the world stop and think about it.

Student C

Sometimes the news is good, like when a pilot avoids disaster by landing a plane safely after engine failure, the signing of a peace treaty after years of conflict, but often it is sad, like a major accident, earthquake or flood. We stop and think about these things because they affect the lives of human beings just like us. This is the news that makes us reflect on the value of human life.

Leader

65 years ago a piece of news took longer to travel round the world but it certainly made people think long and hard about the actions of human beings. We are thinking about it especially today. It was news of the retreat of the Nazis and the liberation of camps where they murdered people and held their prisoners.

Student D

65 years ago, on 27th January, Russian troops entered Auschwitz-Birkenau, a Nazi death camp.

Student A

There were no mobile phones and they couldn't send emails but millions of people around the world were shocked when they heard the news from the soldiers who witnessed for themselves the results of the Nazi-organised genocide against the Jews of Europe - the Holocaust.

Leader

The Nazis were prejudiced against the Jews and other people who did not fit their image of a "perfect" human being. They believed in discrimination. They acted with hatred. Yet those who followed Nazi policies were human beings. It might be uncomfortable for us to think about this but their actions were human actions. Today, all around the world millions of people of all ages are taking time to reflect on the effects of human action. We are joining with them to commemorate the victims and survivors of the Holocaust because although these events happened all over Europe 65 years ago, commemorating them today reminds us of the terrible results of discrimination and encourages people to work together against prejudice.

Student B

Thanks to the courage of eye-witnesses who survived, spoke and still speak about it today we know what happened. It is important that we use the knowledge we have of these events, to be watchful in our own society, and to condemn all racism and prejudice.

Student C

Today, even though they are growing older and more frail, many Holocaust survivors are determined to share their stories with as many people as possible. They don't do this to become famous but they would like their stories to be remembered. They want to use them to help human beings of all ages to learn important lessons for our society. They call this their **Legacy of Hope** and they want us to become a part of it.

Student D

Some survivors share their stories with their grandchildren and great grandchildren. Others have recorded their testimony for museums and libraries around the world. In the UK many survivors travel many miles to speak to audiences large and small. Ibi and Wal Ginsberg live in Leeds. They travel to schools and colleges all over the Country telling their stories and using them to encourage young people to challenged discrimination and hatred.

Leader (*Give your commentary over the powerpoint presentation of Ben's story*).

Ben Helfgott is 80 years old. He lives in London. He says he is fortunate to have lived a full and meaningful life. When he was 9 years old the Nazi invaded Poland. Ben and his family were ordered out of their homes and had to live in a ghetto. Many of Ben's friends and family were murdered by the Nazis. Ben was sent to a camp. After liberation Ben came to England. He became a champion weightlifter and represented Britain in two Olympic Games. He was also a respected businessman and raised a family.

Student A

After the Holocaust, Ben made himself a promise. He resolved to work for a better future. He wanted to help create a world where there was greater harmony, mutual respect and understanding amongst people of different races, colour and creed. Today he asks us to be part of his **Legacy of Hope** by becoming more understanding, generous and sensitive to the needs of others.

Student B

Like Ben, Hugo Gryn, survived the Holocaust but many members of his family did not. Writing about his experiences many years later, he reflected on the waste of life and what his murdered relatives and millions like them could have done in the futures the Nazis stole from them....

Leader

“I keep seeing my brother and grandparents in the selection line in Auschwitz, and so many aunts and uncles and cousins and friends and neighbours – indeed most of the Jewish community of my hometown – slowly, unknowingly walking to their deaths. I think of all the love and laughter and learning that was extinguished with their lives ... I think of the homes they might have built, the illnesses they might have cured [and] how civilisation could have been strengthened.”

Student C

When Hugo thought about liberation he saw the potential for a **Legacy of Hope** he thought people would react in positive ways.

Leader

“When the world saw and understood what unspeakable atrocities had been committed in the name of racism born of a long-festering prejudice, intolerance and the deafening silence of bystanders – why, I was sure that never again would there be any anti-semitism, or race-hatreds of any kind and that nothing would ever again erode the Divine image imprinted in every human being and the dignity of individual men and women.”

Student D

But not all people reacted in the way Hugo expected. Some people were still full of hatred. He thought about them and wrote...

Leader

“The sad truth is that tyranny and race-hatred did not end when the Second World War ended.”

Student A

But because he also believed that human beings could make better choices his vision for peace did not die. He set us a challenge...

Leader

“Time is short and the task is urgent. Evil is real. So is good. There is a choice. And we are not so much chosen as choosers. Life is holy. All life. Mine and yours. And that of those who came before us and the life of those after us.”

Student B

There is still chance for us to become part of the **Legacy of Hope** by examining our own actions towards others and working together to challenge prejudice, discrimination and hatred. We might not make headline news but let’s start here within our own community, encourage others to do the same in theirs and step by step we might even change the world.

Reflective Moment

This extract from the poems Brave and Startling Truth and Equality could be presented by a group of choral speakers or the leader and individual students may take a verse each.

Brave and Startling Truth/Equality

(Maya Angelou)

When we come to it
We, this people, on this wayward, floating body
Created on this earth, of this earth
Have the power to fashion for this earth
A climate where every man and every woman
Can live freely without sanctimonious piety
And without crippling fear

When we come to it
We must confess that we are the possible
We are the miraculous, the true wonders of this world
That is when, and only when
We come to it.

Equality

You declare you see me dimly
through a glass which will not shine,
though I stand before you boldly,
trim in rank and making time.
You do own to hear me faintly
as a whisper out of range,
while my drums beat out the message
and the rhythms never change.
Equality, and I will be free.
Equality, and I will be free.

You announce my ways are wanton,
that I fly from man to man,
but if I'm just a shadow to you,
could you ever understand?
We have lived a painful history,
we know the shameful past,
but I keep on marching forward,
and you keep on coming last.
Equality, and I will be free.
Equality, and I will be free.

Take the blinders from your vision,
take the padding from your ears,
and confess you've heard me crying,
and admit you've seen my tears.
Hear the tempo so compelling,
hear the blood throb through my veins.
Yes, my drums are beating nightly,
and the rhythms never change.
Equality, and I will be free.
Equality, and I will be free.

Everyone holds their phones up ready to use before saying together.

All presenters

We are lucky to live in the age of electronic communication. We promise to communicate our **Legacy of Hope.**

Hugo Gryn's words are taken from Chasing Shadows.(2000) Published in London by Viking. ISBN 0-670-88793-5, pp256-9

Maya Angelou prepared Brave and Startling Truth/Equality for the 50th anniversary of the United Nations <http://www.math.buffalo.edu/~sww/angelou/poems-ma.html#equality>