

## **Jewish cemeteries project - Model school**

Arany János Sashegyi Primary School and High School, 9th grade

Project leader teachers: Szilvia Csanády, Éva Marton

Report written by Éva Marton

"And you shall tell your sons..." This Torah command was recalled when we were selected and approached to participate - as a "model school" - in the Preserving Jewish Cemeteries project.

Because "telling it" is also about preserving and passing on the past to younger generations. As long as there are people who remember, who keep the memories, the stories live, the people live.

We started the project with my 9th grade language class, which started in September. It was an honour, but also a fear, to work with a class that we hardly knew, on such a difficult and sensitive subject.

In the first session, we watched two films from the Centropa archive (Introduction to the History of 20th Century Hungarian Jewry, Love on a Paper Airplane) together, and based on the films we discussed the Second World War, Judaism and the Holocaust. They were open to the idea of participating in this project. It was important to bring the class together, so we took part in a number of joint activities to raise awareness and sensitise them.

In October, twenty students and I took part in Centropa's Kinszki Walk, where we were introduced to the life and work of photographer Imre Kinszki, while we ourselves were able to become urban photographers for a short time, discovering Budapest of the past and present through the optics of Kinszki's time.

### Exploring the cemetery

Before our first visit to the cemetery, we held a session with Szilvi to the group, where we talked about the different cults of the dead. Since most of them had never been to a Jewish cemetery before, we also talked about how traditional Jewish burial customs differ from other funeral services. What rules to follow when visiting a cemetery.

We chose the Farkasréti Jewish cemetery as the subject of our project because it is very close to our school.

On the first visit, the students were given tasks in groups of 4-5. We printed out different symbols of the graves and they had to discover them on each grave and take a photo of it. The students were also given an exercise sheet, where they had to find the graves of some well-known people and find out why they put stones on the graves. The groups were free to explore the world of the cemetery, to wander around it, and then to share their experiences, photos and new knowledge with each other in the cemetery.

Szilvi Csanády set up a kahoot task, which allowed the students to deepen their new knowledge, which they really enjoyed.

The Csörsz Street Orthodox Jewish cemetery is also located in the 12th district, the oldest Jewish cemetery in Buda, which has been closed for decades and can only be visited with special permission. The walk through the cemetery was a great experience, where Bence Ilyés told us about the history of the cemetery, the orthodox traditions, the graves and their

history. The students, as they wrote in their reflections, really enjoyed the young historian's presentation and the discovery of this special cemetery, which is at the heart of the city.

### Planning the project work

It was great to have enough time to plan and prepare the project work. We also found out which students would like to go deeper into the topic. We discussed the idea of making a film about the cemetery and how we had developed the theme. The students also undertook to create an exhibition. We set up working groups according to who would be involved in what part of the project, what they wanted to do and what they were talented at. They documented the walks, took the photos, filmed and made the film. We had a team of reporters who did the interviews in the film - we felt it was important that some of the famous people who are buried in Farkasréti cemetery are remembered by family members or friends. Thus, a conversation about the writer György Konrád was held with one of his sons, József Konrád, and music historian and musician György Kroó was interviewed by his former colleague, journalist and literary translator László Győri. It was a fantastic experience for me to work with so many talented, skillful and determined young people.

We became weekly visitors to the cemetery, we talked a lot with the very nice caretaker of the cemetery, who knows everything about the graves. The students who made the film read a lot about the cemetery's past, looked up some of the celebrities buried there. We spent exciting mornings here, and learned more and more not only about the cemetery's past, but also about human fates, customs and family stories.

### Making the exhibition and the film

September seemed so long in coming, the spring deadline for the project seemed so far away, but in February we realised that time was running out. Ideas were born again and again, desires for more interviews, for a more thorough exploration of the cemetery, but the deadline was approaching. We decided to continue researching the cemetery after the project, possibly taking the exhibition to other schools, with students talking about their experiences here.

At the moment we are putting the finishing touches to the exhibition, editing and cutting thousands of photos, preparing for the opening.