

# Anne Frank -A History for Today

## **Context of the Program**

Adolescence is the stage where students undergo tremendous behavioral changes and face an identity crisis. At this stage, students need to be guided sensitively to help them transition from children to mature adults. Schools often have to tackle a lot of issues with middle and high school children due to this. During our school visits, there was a constant requirement from schools to engage with these students and address them on a range of adolescent related issues. We felt that hosting an exhibition would be a good opportunity to interact with a large number of students. It would also serve as a powerful medium to teach not just history, but to talk about aspects of individual development and social sensitivity. Hence we decided to host the Anne Frank Exhibition that travels to promote world peace and talk about Human Rights.



## **About the program**

'Anne Frank -A History for Today' is a travelling exhibition on the life Anne Frank, a Jewish German girl who was forced to go into hiding along with her family for two years during the Second World War. She had recorded her experiences in a diary, which opens our eyes to the horrors of racial discrimination. Anne was only one among over a million children who were victims of the Holocaust.

Azim Premji Foundation in collaboration with the Directorate of School Education, Puducherry and Seagull Foundation, Kolkata hosted the exhibition in three venues over a period of eighteen days from 24<sup>th</sup> Jan to 11<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2016. The exhibition was held in three places: Vivekananda Government Higher Secondary School, Villianur, Government Technical School, Lawspet and Jawahar Navodaya in Kalapet. Over 2500 students of class VIII from 52 schools visited during the course of the exhibitions. Out of this, 48 schools were government schools and 4 were alternate schools. The department had issued circulars to the government schools and allotted time slots for visit. Apart from school children, public also visited the exhibition. The event was



covered in The Hindu, New Indian Express, Dina Malar and Times of India which helped reach out to the public. A student of Mass Communication from Pondicherry University, visited the exhibition to work on a project on this theme.

Each batch of students spent around three hours at the exhibition venue. During the first 40 minutes, students attended an interactive session which dealt with the idea of bias and discrimination followed by a discussion on having to accept and respect differences. They then proceeded to view the Anne Frank exhibition for 40 minutes which had pictorial panels highlighting the important turn points in Anne's life and World History. Post the exhibition, they watched a twenty two minute Tamil documentary on the life of Anne Frank which reinforced the ideas they had seen in the exhibition. Finally, students sat for a discussion for about another 40 minutes, sharing what they have learnt from the sessions and taking a resolution to respect everyone and not to avoid others based on differences. Overall each batch spent 2.5 hours at the venue.

### **Teacher Workshop ...**

15 teachers had volunteered to be with us in this program and they actively took up the role of explaining the panels to the students. On 24<sup>th</sup> January, there was an initial orientation for these teachers co-facilitated by Ms. Megha Malhotra from Seagull Peace Works. Teachers watched the movie on Anne Frank, read parts of the diary and engaged in a discussion to understand the aims of the exhibition. There were two main discussions that took place. One was on historical aspect – the context of the World War II, rise of Hitler and viewing it through the eyes of a young girl. The other was on our approach with the students, that it should be more transformative than informative. Megha began the discussion asking teachers what they felt about the exhibition, what touched them the most and how would they connect it to today's scenario. Discussion on identity politics, violence, etc. helped them to understand the aim of the exhibition. She then went on to explain each of the panels. Every new batch of teachers were briefed for two hours to help them facilitate the panels with the students.

## A day at the exhibition

### Introductory Activity....

The first forty minute session was to drive two main points. The first point is that all human beings are unique and possess differences. Since no two people are the same, it is important that we accept and respect these differences. Discrimination begins from an inability to accept differences. This was done with the help an activity. All children were given a sheet of paper and asked to close their eyes and follow a set of instructions. They were asked to fold and tear the paper multiple times. At the end of it, they were asked to open their eyes and unfold the paper. It was interesting to see the patterns that were created and also to notice that no two students had managed to create the exact same pattern.



The second point was to make them aware of how we isolate or separate people based on differences and to sensitize them towards this issue. This activity had to be carried out in silence - without speaking or gesturing to their peers. Students were asked to close their eyes while the volunteers (teachers and facilitators) pasted different colored stickers on their foreheads. Students would not be aware of the color on their heads. On opening their eyes, they had to find the group they belonged to by walking towards or away from each other. Same color stickers form a group and they must not accommodate other color stickers in their group. The group must walk/ move away. Among the lot, there were a few single colors. As students started forming groups, these children were left separated without being taken into any of the groups. Once all the groups were formed and a few were left separate, the students were asked to share their experiences and feelings.

The students who did not belong to any group would often share that they felt irritated, angry, sad, left out or embarrassed when their friends and others moved away from them. They also felt agitated as they were unable to identify their own colors. The students in the bigger groups shared that even though they moved away as part of the game, they felt bad having singled out their friends.

A discussion followed the activity on how we usually isolate a person based on differences; differences that they belong to a different category – looks, caste, religion, language, economical status etc. While in the game, the stickers can be easily removed and differences can be forgotten, but in life we are born with differences that cannot be easily removed. Hence it is important to be able to accept differences and not isolate anybody based on any such factors.



With this introduction, students were briefly introduced about the life of Anne Frank and the background of the holocaust and they proceeded to watch the exhibition.

### **Main Exhibition and Video...**

The exhibition had thirty two panels that tells us two stories in parallel – the story of Anne Frank and Germany. Panels narrate the situation of Germany after the First World War, the rise of Hitler, the measures taken to isolate Jews and other non-Aryans, the condition of the Jews during the Second World War and a glimpse into the concentration camps where they were systematically murdered in masses. It concludes with Mr. Otto Frank, Anne’s father, starting the Anne Frank Foundation to promote peace and the diary being published as book that has been since translated in 60 odd languages.



Volunteer teachers walked the students through the exhibition interacting with them while explaining the panels and connecting it to their lives. The teachers highlighted the various sources of history available on the panels like photographs, diary snippets, letters etc. to help students visualize the past events. They discussed with students on a broad range of topics like violence, race, war etc. which aroused the curiosity in students to know more about the Holocaust.

Each batch of students were further divided into smaller groups and there was a teacher for each of these small groups. Some teaches opted to narrate it in a story form while others looked at it as

history. On engaging with the students, teachers were also enthused to update their own knowledge on the subject.



Students also watched a documentary on the life of Anne Frank and other Jews during the Second World War. The video had a voice over in Tamil which helped them connect to the panels seen at the exhibition and also visualize occurrences during the war.

### **De-brief Session...**

The debrief session was planned to understand the understanding of the children and to assess if they were able to connect all the information they have acquired during the Activity, Video and Exhibition walkthrough. The session was dialogue oriented, where the facilitator enquired what they learned about the Anne Frank, Hitler, Holocaust, discrimination and linked them back to what they have experienced in their real life by prompting children to share experiences of discriminating others.



Some snippets of the question and answer sessions are given below:

What sessions were held in this exhibition?

- Activity session
- Anne frank exhibition
- Anne frank film session

What was interesting in this exhibition?

- We came to know about Anne, Hitler, German, Jews and how Germans hated Jews.
- We saw the photos of Anne, Hitler, War, Peter...
- Dairy, Dates, write-up, video...

Why do we need to know all this?

- We should know the truth about what happened.
- We are able to visualize what would have happened and how Jews suffered

What was your learning?

- Anne's life
- War
- Hitler's Army
- Peoples' suffering

What you learn today?

- Don't want to be a Hitler - he was violent, killed Jews, disabled Jews and put them in the camp.
- Want to be Anne – She suffered and yet she wrote on her suffering
- Want to become Miep Gies – how she helped the sufferer, Kept dairy in safe

What is humanism?

No caste differences, respecting all religion, helping poor, nondiscrimination, equality, opportunity, respecting others and acceptance.

Is this the answer for the question or the value which we have to develop within us?

We have to follow them.

Where all do you see discrimination?

- Those who study well discriminate against the students who do not
- Rich people discriminate against the poor
- Upper caste discriminate against lower caste
- Men discriminate against – women
- This party discriminate against that party
- People with fair complexion discriminate against dark complexioned people

Share your experience of discriminating others?

- We form a group and talk bad on the girls who we don't like.
- We unnecessarily disturb some friends
- I don't talk with my class mate who are not able to study because I think they are fools.
- I don't like some of them in my class, now I am thinking on it.

Are we discriminating against the people who have power or those who are powerless?

- Powerless

What do you understand by the terms 'power' and 'powerless'?

We donot know much about it. But we feel we understand it.

(In all sessions, this question seemed to make them intuitively understand power relations but they were not able to articulate it very clearly)

Explain the characters in the story and how they can be grouped together?

- Hitler – Nazis, people who disabled and killed Jews
- Anne- Father, Mother, sister, Peter, Friends... (They were able to tell most of their names)
- Helpers – MIEP GIES, others

Are there such groups in our society at present?

- Some people are discriminating others.
- Some groups are discriminated by others.
- Some people are watching.
- Some people are helping

Think, who would you want to be?

- Helping the discriminated (This is the usual answer)

How?

- I go to the hospital where people are suffering.
- I give food for baggers.
- I respect all my friends.
- I will not beat

Students are asked to close their eyes and think of their plan for life – how they would follow the values of Humanity, Nondiscrimination, Nonviolence and accepting difference in their daily life.

This discussion helped to probe children to check if they have understood the values of non-violence, equality, helping others, being humane. Another important point that came out in the discussion was that there are always four categories of people: discriminators, victims, by-standers and helpers and one must be conscious to not be in the category of discriminators, victims or by-standers. The session concluded with children taking a mental vow that they will not participate in any act of discrimination or isolation.

### @ Jawahar Navodaya School...

On request from Jawahar Navodaya School, we hosted the exhibition in their campus where four schools with a total of 700 students visited it in three days from 8<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> February. 30 JNV students of class X had volunteered to explain the panels to the visitors.

There was an initial orientation for these 30 students. Since they had already read the Anne Frank diary, they were familiar with the character. The exhibition helped them understand better the condition of many others at that time. After they read through the posters of the exhibition, they sat down for a discussion where they asked doubts regarding the exhibition. How did Hitler rise, why didn't the Jews rebel or fight back, why the Jews only were persecuted, how was it that the world was unaware of such an event etc. were some of the leading questions that directed the course of the discussion. Students chose panels that touched them the most to explain to others.

### Summary

Below is the table containing the summary of the students, teachers and schools who visited the exhibition.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>No. of Teachers</b>	<b>No. of Schools</b>
<b>Lawspet</b>	<b>1169</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Villianur</b>	<b>614</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Navodaya</b>	<b>710</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2493</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>52</b>

Our observations:

- Most of the children showed interest to learn. Especially girl children were very keen to learn. The exhibition bore a festive look and all children took part enthusiastically. The accompanying teachers were also keen learners and asked questions for clarification.

- The entire sequence of reaching the exhibition, dividing themselves, entering in to different session with expectation and then being exposed to the variety of activities, panels, film show and the final discussion thrilled students.
- A few private schools like Aikyan, Akshara Vidhyashram, Vidhya Niketan and Vivekananda brought their students to the exhibition. Even these children and accompanying teachers were enlightened by the exhibition.
- Also a student of Mass communication from Pondicherry University, expressed her interest for the book writing project.

No event is complete if we do not acknowledge people who have supported this endeavor in their own manner, though not directly associated with this event.



We also got the support of our friends in the designing of the posters, proof corrections and offering suggestions. The timely external support we received from the printers, film editors, transport and technical supporters played a vital role in the successful execution of this exhibition.

The Hindu, New Indian Express, Dina Malar and Times of India covered the event which helped in reaching out to the public on public holidays.

While we were interacting with the children, it made us reflect on ourselves and how we see power constructs and make use of it in our lives. We also thought that we should plan such events for students and teachers where in deeper values of equality, rights and duties get inculcated in the learning community.

In our quest for a just, humane and equitable society, this was a small act to touch the student community and make them reflect on themselves and the society around them. We cherish our memorable association with Seagull Foundation, Kolkata and we are thankful to the Education Department who helped this event reach innumerable students in Pondicherry.