

# Plainfield Student Exhibit Examines Questions One Faces After Witnessing Tragic Events

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## EDUCATION



*Maryah Charles, 18, 12th Gr Student of the Month - BOAACCD, with her quote: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor" – Desmond Tutu*

PLAINFIELD, NJ - A Plainfield student exhibit entitled 'Silhouettes in Black: How Do We Maintain Our Humanity?' by Barack Obama Academy for Academic and Civic Development (BOAACD students examines the powerful and poignant questions people face when they witness tragic events or violence.

The silhouettes of young faces looking straight ahead welcome visitors to the school. The large cut-outs elaborated in black construction paper are part of the exhibit created by students as part of their research and discussion on how someone retains his or her humanity in times of great violence, such as a genocide, war, or persecution?

The assignment is part of a collaborative effort by students in English/Humanities Class and History Class. Their teachers, Ms. Elizabeth McIntosh and Ms. Norma Flores, assigned the students to work

together in groups to arrive at a project that could exemplify what they have learned. The project's end-product has to include supportive evidence with a visual arts and a media component.

Ms. McIntosh's class analyzed current national events that have brought worldwide attention to the questions of race, immigration, and intolerance. The students had to select an historic figure or personality that best represented how they felt.

"I chose to write about the "Black Lives Matter" movement because I needed to not only examine white on black crime, but also black on black crime," said Micah Jordan, a student in Ms. McIntosh's class. "My silhouette and poem became a plea for people of color to unite, and a tribute to two fallen friends."

Ms. McIntosh said, "This unit evolved from student concern about the presidential race in the United States and the rise in violence. The lessons and topics that were presented have been very interesting and eye-opening for the students. They have been able to articulate their concerns and put their thoughts to paper."

In Ms. Flores's class the students are learning about historic events such as the Holocaust, WWII, and modern conflicts that include events in Syria, Europe and other parts of the world. Using primary sources, independent and guided research, the students are creating a newsreel for YouTube that will demonstrate the effect of World War II on multiple groups of people. They have chosen a video as the medium for the delivery of their presentation.

"The students are not just talking about issues during WWII like the Holocaust and Japanese internment camps, they are reporting on more recent incidents of human tragedy and genocide. They are including news reports and stories to answer the essential question, "Does history repeat itself?"

Overall, the exhibit "Silhouettes in Black: How Do We Maintain Our Humanity" will include two mediums that will allow the students to report on messages and stories that will help them answer the questions posed by their teachers and create lively class discussion.

"Students are excited to work on this project and visually they see the end product," said Ms. Flores.

Imir Santos, said, "The PBL project gave us the opportunity to examine and discuss the serious problems facing people of color racially, culturally, and economically. It also allowed me and my class to face our fears. I am a black male, and I fear each day may be my last. But it also gave me hope. Our teacher tells us that in each moment of each day we are given choices, and it is in those moments we can choose to act on the side of good/right or the side of bad/wrong. When we create the good, that is our humanity.

Over twenty students are participating in this exercise which will conclude with the video in a few more days. For now, their pieces in black are hanging on the wall as a reminder. Black Silhouettes: How Do We Maintain Our Humanity? are now on exhibit at the Barack Obama Academy for Academic and Civic Development, at 1200 Myrtle Avenue. Visitors are welcome to view the exhibit.

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