



Empowered to take a more active role in their learning:

Through rigorous core classes and a slate of interesting electives, Middle Schoolers are encouraged to engage deeply with course content and take responsibility for their growth. Here, Scott Ringenbach works with Think It! Design It! Make It! students **AVA LI '26**, **MORGAN RILEY '25**, **DANE WOELFFER '26** and **MILES HUGHEY '26** (at back) to launch their custom-designed rockets.

Washington, D.C., Museum Project

Playing a more active role helps eighth-graders find their voices

BY STACY CALFO

1. Sarah Baker and students **SOFIA PEDRETTI '24**, **OLIVIA MEYERS '24** and **JACK DOUGLAS '24** discuss the Holocaust-themed novels they chose as part of their project for the class trip to Washington, D.C.
2. Students visit landmarks and government buildings as well as monuments and museums during their class trip to the nation's capital.
3. Eighth-graders talk with a Holocaust survivor after their tour of the museum in Washington, D.C.





REFLECTING ANOTHER KEY ELEMENT of the task force’s vision for innovation – empowering students to take active roles in their education – Ravenscroft’s eight-grade teachers have reimagined their approach to a longstanding tradition for Middle Schoolers: the annual class trip to Washington, D.C. and its many monuments and museums.

“We took a theme approach to the trip this year,” language arts teacher Sarah Baker said. Ahead of the visit, “students chose a Holocaust-focused novel and picked out significant themes that resonated with them. When they arrived in Washington, D.C., their goal was to find reflections of their chosen themes in every museum we visited. It gave them a focus for the trip.”

“We spent significant time before the trip discussing how the Holocaust came to be,” Josh Gallagher, who teaches history, added. “It was truly a collaborative effort to ensure our students were thinking about this experience from every angle.”



“Insightful and interesting”

To extend their learning from their classwork and trip, students were challenged to develop a new exhibit for the Holocaust Museum and give a presentation on why it should be added. Part of their preparation for that project was to keep a journal of observations and reflections about their experiences during the trip.

“We visited the Holocaust Museum, the Newseum, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the Air and Space Museum,” **ALEXA GILLON '24** said. “They were all so insightful and interesting.”

“When we visited the museums, we had to look at the exhibits and think about how we could incorporate some of the elements into our own exhibit,” such as artifacts and other visuals, narration and tone, and interactive features, **JACKSON REIN '24** said. “Teachers also stressed the importance of being respectful because of the sensitive material that we were going to observe.”

“We weren’t asking them to do separate things in different museums. It wasn’t just a scavenger hunt for facts,” Baker said. “We wanted them to see themes that were consistent. The lessons were so fresh in their mind, it was easier for them to focus on and integrate what they were seeing.”

“A student-driven piece”

Students agreed that having a theme to focus on gave shape to their overall experience in Washington, D.C., and made them more engaged in what they were seeing.

“The book I read was ‘The Winter Horses,’ and the theme I derived was that those who are mentally and physically strong can fight through adversity,” Jackson said. “I proposed an exhibit that would enhance the existing stories of three Holocaust survivors, Jakob Blankitny, Rosa Marie Burger and Irene Csillag.”

“I read ‘Milkweed’ by Jerry Spinelli and chose to explore how survival is dependent on selflessness,” Alexa added. “I created my exhibit based on the smugglers of the Warsaw Ghetto and the caretakers of orphans because I was struck by how truly selfless people were during such dire and dark circumstances. Without identifying this theme, I’m not sure I would have realized the sacrifice so many private citizens made to help the victims of the Holocaust.”

“This is really a student-driven piece,” Gallagher said. “We do what we can to build the historical background, but we want them to be able to place themselves in this place and time.”

“Student interest is allowed to shine through this model,” Baker concluded. “They are reading a book independently of others in class, so this enables them to take their own direction. It’s their interpretation of the author’s work. They have a voice.”