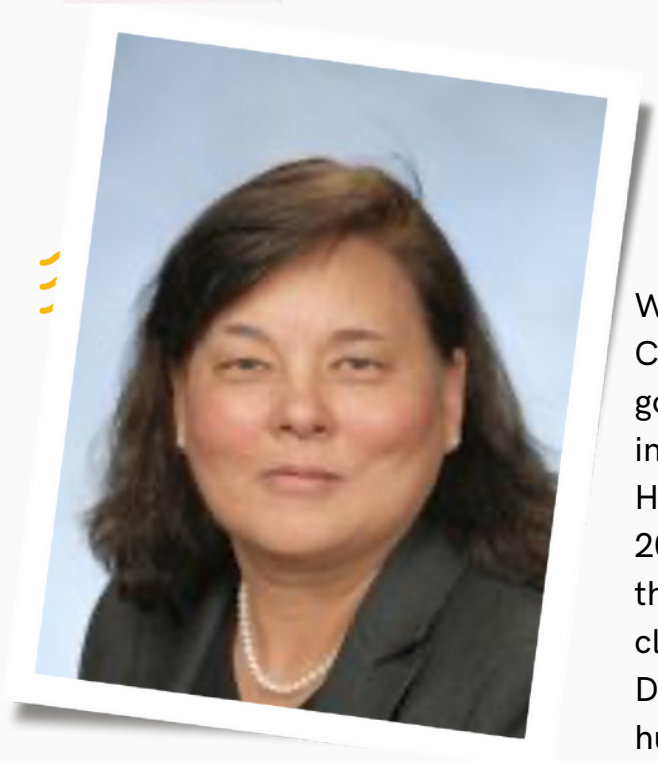
THE WEBER SCHOOL



MELINDA GOODWIN

Social Studies Teacher

While it was easy to envision the application of the Civic Spirit Institute content in my high school government classes, I specifically focused on incorporating a greater civic focus into my 9th grade Honors World History and Humanities course in 2022-23. In particular, I designed the course around the theme of ancient human migration while taking a closer look at the historical context of the Jewish Diaspora and introducing students to contemporary human migration issues as a way to better understand the historical issues. I arranged for a Preview of the Film, REFUGE, and Q & A with the young Jewish Director, Erin Bernhardt (Atlanta native) and received a Weber School Parent Group Micro-grant to pay for the project. My three sections were joined by other 9th grade classes and members of the Jewish Studies faculty with the goal that discussion would continue at the school in a cross-disciplinary manner. Although I had considered the film as a possibility prior to the Civic Spirit Seminar in New York, I was really challenged to incorporate it in a larger way into the course after talking with Nina and Yael at Civic Spirit.

Why the Documentary Film, REFUGE?

- Our focus on the push-pull factors of human migration in World History and the Jewish Diaspora led us to examine the challenges of contemporary refugees;
- Clarkston, GA as a concentrated hub of immigration in Atlanta was local, but unknown to our suburban students and the film provided an opportunity to broaden their community understanding of migration and citizenship issues;
- We were able to explore issues of religious persecution of minority groups; identity and cultural blending conflicts that immigrants face; citizenship issues; and possibilities for community building in a polarized world through the film highlighting the unlikely friendship of a Kurdish Muslim refugee and a White nationalist (former KKK member) in Georgia.
- The film also challenged students to personally consider how to confront hate and misunderstanding as well as develop empathy and understanding for those who are different than us.

THE WEBER SCHOOL

The students responded with great interest in the film, and asked the director excellent questions. The discussion continued in subsequent classes and the students took up the director's challenge to help write questions for the film discussion guide for young people. We planned a follow-up project in Clarkston for a smaller group of interested students (English conversation classes) for the late spring/early fall of 2023.

Overall, the Civic Spirit Educator Fellowship exceeded my expectations. It was the best professional development opportunity that I have participated in years. I was challenged by the discussion comments of my peers in the cohort and the presentations by the professors both at the Summer Institute in New York and during the monthly Zoom opportunities. The events offered during the year for Civic Spirit Alumni as well as the general public were relevant and timely discussions of current topics. I especially benefitted from the monthly education cohort Zoom meetings with Nina Taub, an experienced educator, who helped to direct me to relevant resources and documents that enhanced the 9th grade course curriculum and our discussions which challenged me to think more deeply about the civic issues confronting teens today.

Our students need practical tools for how to assess, discuss, and work together on the problems facing our nation and world. I am thankful for the encouragement and resources that Civic Spirit provides educators like myself to better assist our students to bridge gaps of division and misunderstanding and become equipped citizens for the present and future. By refocusing attention on original documents and the Founders' debates, and seeking to bring together a diverse group of educators to discuss the relevancy of these debates for today, Civic Spirit renewed my hope in civic possibilities for the future.

Check out a feature on their school's website!

THE WEBER SCHOOL

HOME | CALENDAR

11 Sh'vat 5783 *Thursday, February 2, 2023*

This week, a group of students from 9th grade World History and Hebrew classes viewed a screening of the award-winning documentary "Refuge" with its director, Jewish Atlanta native Erin Bernhardt. Set in Clarkston and Lafayette, Georgia, "Refuge" tells a story of an unlikely friendship that develops between a Kurdish refugee who becomes an Atlanta cardiologist and a former Klansman as they attempt to understand each other's past and present and bridge their differences.

When asked about the value of the screening for students, Social Studies teacher Melinda Goodwin said, "One of the recurring themes in our studies of the ancient world is the examination of human migration and diaspora through the ages and the tragic difficulties faced by different groups of people, including the Jewish community. By looking at a contemporary and local example of refugees within Atlanta, we can explore further the challenges of minority groups maintaining cultural and religious identity, prejudice and persecution, and what it means to be a citizen."

After the screening, Director Bernhardt was available to answer the students' questions, giving them a valuable opportunity to hear about the director's personal connection to this story and its southern roots.

"Refuge" film screening featured on The Weber School's website.