

Burlington High School

67 Cherry Street
Burlington, Vermont 05401
Phone: (802) 864-8411

Sabrina Westdijk, Interim Principal
Sara Crothers, Assistant Principal
Jada Payea, Assistant Principal
KasCandra Dougherty, Director of School Counseling
Molly Doran, Dean of Students

To Whom It May Concern,

April 5, 2024

On behalf of Burlington High School, we'd like to express a deep gratitude for our partnership with The Lost Mural Project, housed at Ohavi Zedek Synagogue. We are in our second year of partnership bringing freshmen students on a field trip that is essential to their high school experience. We have brought over 400 students total, 100 students at a time, to spend a half day at the synagogue, viewing artifacts and listening to presentations from community members from different cultural backgrounds. Over and over again, we have heard students and chaperones remark that the field trip was one of the most powerful experiences of their school year. The Lost Mural Project truly embodies what the mural represents: a welcoming tent, providing an inclusive environment where learning and community building can thrive.

Working with The Lost Mural Project has been a deeply rewarding experience for our educational team. To illuminate the success of this collaboration, we have outlined how The Lost Mural Project provided the support and autonomy for us to be able to achieve our specific curriculum goals. Our 9th grade Humanities team (English and Social Studies,) teaches a unit called "Resistance in the Face of Erasure." In English, students read *Night*, by Elie Wiesel, set during the Holocaust, and then a book called "When Stars Are Scattered," by Omar Mohamed & Victoria Jamieson, about the impacts of the Somali Civil War. In Social Studies, students will bear witness to examples of attempted erasure of a variety of identity groups (both historical and current) and consider the aspects of the various stages of genocide, as per the Geneva Convention. In both classes, students will be encouraged to discover the various ways humans resist in the face of such atrocities. Resistance can be armed, it can be protests and marches, but it can also be survival, nonconformity, and preservation/celebration of culture through music, dance, food, clothing, and art. The Lost Mural is a beautiful example of survival, and therefore resistance against erasure, of Eastern European Jewish culture that has been kept alive in Burlington. Allowing students to sit in the same space as this powerful art piece and to view artifacts that were saved from intended destruction, provides an authenticity to these examples of resistance that would be hard to capture from looking at a textbook image or completing a webquest.

In this way, our field trip to the Lost Mural Project has helped to make the learning 'real.' We were able to work alongside The Lost Mural Project leadership to use the space to invite guest speakers from our local community of Burlington, Vermont to share their own examples of resistance. We've had guests from the Somali community, the Bosnian community, the Palestinian community, the African-American community, and the Tibetan community. They hosted us with three separate rooms to be used simultaneously, which accommodated smaller group presentations and a more intimate experience for our students. Students leaned into the power of sharing stories and enjoyed the opportunity to consider a variety of ways different groups/individuals are actively preserving their own culture(s). The entire experience was made possible by the expertise of the Lost Mural Project and their commitment to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for our students. We wholeheartedly recommend this opportunity to other schools and encourage all to consider the importance of shining a light on all examples of resistance in the face of erasure.

In gratitude,

Burlington High School 9th Grade Humanities Team (Jory Hearst, Bowen Stephens, Michelle Sagalchik, Francesca Dupuis, Kathryn Buchan, Hayden Chichester, Susan Blethen & Andrew Cloutier)

"Educating and inspiring all students to influence and shape the future."