

# Graduate Spotlight

Every year, the International School for Holocaust Studies holds hundreds of educational activities, in a dozen languages, for over 300,000 students and educators in Israel and around the world. Featured here is one of the School's graduates, and what she has achieved since:



## Olena Zhadko Ukraine

### Lauren Abecassis-Kandravy

■ As she began to teach the Holocaust to her students in the Dnepropetrovsk region of Ukraine, school principal Olena Zhadko found that what fascinated her most was the story of Jewish life in her region. Through internet-based research, Zhadko learned about the Ukrainian Holocaust Center – a partner of the International School for Holocaust Studies' European Department.

At the Holocaust Center, Zhadko attended professional development seminars in Ukraine, France and Poland, where she connected with many experts who broadened her scope of knowledge and provided her with a professional network of like-minded educators. But her most formative educational experience took place in 2007, when she traveled to Jerusalem to take part in a seminar for Russian-speaking educators. "At Yad Vashem I gained new pedagogical tools and techniques that I had never encountered before, especially with regards to their unique age-targeted approach," explains Zhadko. "As a consequence, for a number of years now I have been organizing school-wide programming for Holocaust Remembrance Day that is both age- and level-appropriate, and therefore much more effective."

Recently, Zhadko developed an educational unit for third- and fourth-graders, called "Ruined Childhood." The unit focuses on *Three Dolls*, the

educational resource booklet written by the International School's Dr. Irit Abramski and based on the Yad Vashem exhibit "No Child's Play." *Three Dolls* relates the experiences of three young girls and their dolls during the Holocaust, emphasizing the role the dolls played for their young owners during a period of such great duress.

Zhadko's project is built in four stages: first the students read the Russian-language version of the booklet; then she leads a class discussion on the role of toys in their lives; and after that they are assigned homework on the topic. The final – and unique – aspect of the project is that the students are asked to bring in their own dolls, and tell the class about their history and other personal experiences they have gone through with them. "The concluding stage of the project generates incredible empathy among the children," says Zhadko. "In a natural, unthreatening atmosphere, the children begin to draw personal parallels to the girls in the



■ *Yad Vashem Graduate Olena Zhadko*



■ *Zhadko's class with their own dolls*

stories, and internalize the struggles they lived through during those dark times."

Claudine Schwartz-Rudel, whose story is featured in the booklet, was very gratified to learn that the tale of her and her doll "Collette" is being taught in Ukraine. "When I was a guide at Yad Vashem, I would tell young visitors about my doll, and it helped them understand my story," recalled Schwartz-Rudel. "I told that doll everything I was feeling, and when I was forced to change my name as we were fleeing, my doll's name changed too. Young people have an intuitive understanding of life-changing events such as these."

*The author works in the European Department, International School for Holocaust Studies.*