

Holocaust book aimed at the young

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MONTICELLO — A picture flashed on the screen in the front of the classroom. Three haggard hands, each with a white Star of David on the right cuff, stretched out.

They pointed toward a word in white painted on the red brick wall:

"Remember!!"

"It is not only to remember; it is to learn," author and artist Israel Bernbaum said yesterday. His book, "My Brother's Keeper," is a children's book about the Holocaust.

Bernbaum spoke to a silent, captivated audience of 150 Monticello High School students, delivering a message of brotherhood in a half-hour slide presentation of his work. He spoke later to students in Liberty.

"It was very sad," Kathleen Washington, 17, of Monticello, said afterward. "I never knew it happened in Poland, I only thought it happened in Germany."

Eli Van Etten, 17, a junior, said the presentation on the Holocaust was a timely message about the evils of racism.

"Even friends, like, say things," said Van Etten. "White kids say things about black kids, and black kids say things about white kids. Racism's been around for a long time."

Van Etten said the half-hour lecture should have been longer, to allow for questions. Richard Shaw, head of the social studies department, agreed.

Shaw said the presentation was ideal for 10th- and 11th-grade social studies classes studying World War II.

"His talk is a perfect introduction to a further discussion of the role of that time period," Shaw said. "And his message about brotherhood is particularly timely, with the Rodney King verdict."

Bernbaum's book received the 1990 German Prize for Young People's Literature. The book was published in 1985, and reprinted in Germany in 1989.

Bernbaum escaped German-occupied Poland when he was 20. He traveled to Russia and then to Paris, where he lived 10 years before coming to the United States.

"The greatest killers were not the numberless gas chambers, and the fires, but indifference," he said. "Never would Hitler have succeeded were it not for the indifference to human suffering."

Bernbaum said he is a historian who tells stories through artwork. Interspersed in the presentation were photographs of the German soldiers on the streets of Warsaw. He based his oil paintings on the photographs.



Israel Bernbaum