

# **Freedom is just participating**

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## **Indifference vs responsibility**

ISS Leardi, Casale Monferrato, Italy

**2014-2017**

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# INTRODUCTION

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## Title

Freedom is just participating: indifference vs responsibility

## Age

Secondary School students (16 – 18 years old).

## Duration

Six periods (60 minutes each).

## Sources



### Introduction: Indifference as a moral question

Indifference is related to the 20th century society, which does not find any hopeful meanings in life: modern man in the western world is surrounded by a lack of communication, even in his consumerist environment, where luxury goods put to sleep moral questions and everybody wears a mask.

Indifference is a sin which becomes mortal in case of war or epoch-making events. That is the case of Shoah and the tragedies which occur every day: men, women and children leaving their countries, war and poverty, are killed by the sea while looking for freedom.

### **MILANO CENTRALE” STATION, PLATFORM 21 – Memorial place**

It is the scene where the tragedy of Shoah started in Milan.

INDIFFERENCE is the key word, written in big capital letters on a concrete wall, in the Shoah Memorial place, near Platform 21 at the Central Station in Milan. Our journey starts from here, following in the tracks of Indifference. In the “heart” of the Memorial there are four old goods wagons, like the ones which set off for Hell. Between December 1943 and January 1945 at least twenty wagons left from here, they were packed with Jews and political opponents and people were indifferent all around. Along the Wall of the Names there is a huge display on which there are the names of the 774 people deported from here: in white the victims and in yellow the few survivors (22). The names are pointed out in rotation, to give them back their dignity.



Shoah, not to forget.

**“[...] let us not speak of them, but look, and pass [...]"**

**Literary Journey through Indifference** from the Greek Sophocles Tragedy to the modern pop song, through the Divina Commedia (Dante) and Brecht (Antigone), looking for traces of participation in the characters and in their attitude towards grievous events.



## Aims

1. Defining the concept of “Indifference”.
2. Inviting the youngest to think about the historical facts occurred in Italy during Fascism.
3. Understanding the role of indifference in the historical events studied.
4. Developing the topic of indifference through literature.
5. Catching the different aspects of the human mind and soul through the analysis of the events occurred to each character and reach truth. Young people will acquire solid ethical and moral values, essential for their lives.
6. Understanding Keats’s words: “*Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all you know on earth, and all you need to know*”. Literature is Beauty.

The students should:

- Learn the historical background which led to the deportation of Italian Jews.

Brancati - Pagliarani, *Dialogo con la storia e l'attualità*. Vol. III La Nuova Italia.

- Read the documents concerning the racial laws issued in Italy in 1938.

Italian racial Laws.

- Know the attitude of common people as regarded the Jews after the racial laws in Italy.

Testimonianza di Liliana Segre, *Corriere della Sera*, 29/01/.

Goti Bauer, Testimonianza, intervento giorno della Memoria 2008.

- Analyse the available documents (photos, newspapers, testimonies).

Liliana Segre's biography, the President of the Association "The children of Shoah".

- Read the chosen texts focusing on the moral question of indifference.
- Reflect on the meaning of personal responsibility for what concerns the choices the youngsters must make.

### Other aspects

- **Classroom arrangements.** Ordinary classrooms or Labs for the videos, the posters and photos. During the drama activities, the students move to the "Aula Magna" (the meeting and conference room of the school).
- **Groups.** Class group. The whole class works on texts, newspapers, magazines, documentaries (indoors). Visit to the Shoah Memorial, Platform 21, Milano Centrale Station, in Milan.
- **Equipment.** Materials: Photos, posters, books, videos, quotations, interviews. Whiteboard and LIM.

## **BIOGRAPHY RATIONALE**

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**Liliana Segre's biography**, the President of the Association "The children of Shoah".

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

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### **Italian Racial Laws 1938**

**"REGIO DECRETO - LEGGE 5 settembre 1938 - XVI, n. 1390"**

**"ROYAL DECREE - Law XVI, N° 1390, 5th September 1938"**

Anti-Semitism was not a major concern for the Italian people in modern Italy until Mussolini introduced it. Mussolini combined anti-Semitism and racism to form the Fascist racial policy.

After Hitler came to power in 1933, Mussolini felt threatened by Hitler's designs on Austria. Mussolini considered himself the protector of Austria and intended to resist German expansion into the region. In order to placate Hitler, while still thwarting his ambition, Mussolini decided to develop an anti-Semitic campaign in Italy. When the Nazis assassinated the Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss in July 1934, Hitler decided to take no further action in order to avoid a conflict with the European powers. Mussolini believed that the German threat was thus removed, therefore, there was no longer a need for any anti-Semitic programme at this time. It wasn't until 1936 that Mussolini re-instituted his anti-Semitic policies due to the political and economic conditions confronting Italy.

One of these conditions was Mussolini's incursion into Ethiopia. Mussolini became concerned with the increase of interracial fraternization with the Ethiopian people and its affect on Italy. Racism now increasingly became an issue in Italy, and Mussolini seized upon this growing trend to promote his racial propaganda. The Ethiopian War and Italy's involvement in the Spanish Civil War resulted in Italy being isolated by the western powers. As a result, Mussolini decided to develop a greater friendship with Hitler. He believed that Hitler would be impressed and willing to ally himself with Italy if anti-Semitic racial laws were instituted in Italy.

Mussolini mobilized the press and radio broadcasts to further galvanize support for his anti-Semitic propaganda which constantly bombarded the Italian people causing some to adhere to his hatred of Jews. In addition, on the 14th of July 1938 he embraced the "Manifesto of the Racial Scientist", which stated that the civilization of Italy is of Aryan origin, and there exists a pure Italian race to which Jews do not belong. This Manifesto was false and dishonest but was utilized to justify the racial laws. Between the 2nd of September 1938 and the 17th of November 1938, Italy enacted a series of racial laws. Some of these laws included the following:



- Foreign Jews were forbidden to settle in Italy, Libya or in the colonial possessions of the Aegean.
- The Italian citizenship granted to Jewish foreigners after the 1st of January 1919 was revoked, and they were required to leave within six months.
- Jews were banned from jobs in the government, banking, insurance, education, entertainment industry and the practice of law.
- Jews were banned from attending all education institutions.
- Marriage was prohibited between Jews and non-Jews.
- Jewish property was confiscated.
- Jewish businesses were “Aryanized” (Jewish businesses confiscated by non-Jews).
- All foreign Jews were required to leave Italy.
- Jews were forbidden to employ non-Jewish Italian domestics.
- Jews were forbidden to serve in the military.
- A special Jewish census conducted in 1938 and continually updated facilitated the future arrests of thousands.

While thousands of foreign Jews were expelled as a result of these racial laws, they were replaced by thousands of Jewish refugees escaping harsh circumstances in their native lands. Since some individual Italians were basically suspicious of government and lax in following rules, not everyone complied with enforcing the racial laws that they believed were unjust.

Those who followed their conscience and resisted the unjust treatment of Jews did so at great personal risk to themselves and their families. This resistance took many forms.

Some Italian Jews transferred businesses and other sources of wealth to trusted Christian friends for safe-keeping. In addition, there were Jewish lawyers who continued servicing non-Jewish clients with the assistance of non-Jewish attorneys. Other examples of non-compliance included those bankers who overlooked or ignored Jewish bank accounts thereby protecting their assets from being confiscated.

In spite of Mussolini’s efforts to rid Italy of Jews, individual Italians not only helped to protect Jewish property but also rescued Jews from certain death by offering them a safe haven from those who planned to murder them. Some Italians made the decision to protect their Jewish friends and neighbours as a matter of conscience. As a result, approximately 80% of Italy’s Jews survived the Holocaust.

While Italy's racial laws were harsh and unjust, after Germany invaded Italy on the 8th of September 1943, conditions worsened for the Jews and survival became the only issue due to the threat of Nazi deportation. What occurred in Italy during the Holocaust is a multi-faceted and complex piece of history that must be examined within the context of the time period.

## Literary texts

### Text 1

**B. Brecht, *Antigone***, or rather when the Ancient Drama becomes a sort of reflection on modern society.

The play was written in 1948, after the author's return to Germany from his exile in the USA. It appears as a sharp example of the strong destructive power of war. Creonte embodies all the conflicts while Antigone represents the anti-war heroine, who strongly opposes to the conflict. There are all the characters of Sophocles' plays but they express Brecht's dramatic epic poetry, which arouses discussions and awakens conscience. The stage is a place where the playwrights, the audience and the actors make questions and find the answers, like in the Ancient Greek Theatre.

**The play is preceded by a prologue of an event which occurs in Berlin in 1945, during the last days of war.** The characters are not powerful sovereigns but two poor girls overwhelmed by the war, deprived of their brother and compelled to work hard in a factory. The two girls are so ordinary that they are deprived of their names: they are simply the First and the Second sister. They are back home from the air-raid shelter and they notice some clues that reveal the return of their brother from war but it is a bitter surprise: their brother is outside the house and has been hanged. The coming of a SS soldier makes the First sister instinctively pretend not to know the deserter/traitor. The Second sister instead immediately takes a knife to cut the rope and wants to bring him to life because, as she says in the last line of the prologue: "Maybe he is still live".

### Text 2

**Sophocles, *Antigone*.** Antigone is a young woman who lives in Thebes, an important town of Ancient Greece. She wants to bury her brother, Polinice who had died in a battle as a traitor of his country. She would oppose to the King Creonte, to the laws, to her community. She encounters the capital punishment. The highest treason for Antigone would be to deny her

family links and disavow her bloodline. Antigone is not indifferent, she is not afraid, she affirms her freedom: she does not hesitate and faces death.

### Text 3

Dante, *Inferno*, Canto III, lines 34-42; 46-51 / Letter XII, To a Florentine friend



### Text "Freedom" - 1972/1973 - Giorgio Gaber

Giorgio Gaber, singer-songwriter, was born in Milan on the 25th of January 1939. He had been studying music and playing the guitar since he was a teenager. After obtaining his diploma in Accountancy he studied Economics at Bocconi University. To earn money and pay his university fees, he played in nightspots and pubs in Milan where he met important leading figures of the pop music. His music performances had great success because he intermingled music and monologues which made the spectator reflect on social problems, politics, love, suffering and hope, everything spiced up with a particular irony which provoked laughter but also awakened conscience. Gaber says about himself: "I think that the audience recognises my intellectual honesty:" I'm not a philosopher, nor a politician but I'm a person who makes an effort to give people, in my performances, the feelings, the states of mind, the messages they can smell in the air."

#### **FREEDOM** (a song by Giorgio Gaber)

*I would like to be free, as a man is free.*

*I want to be free like a man.*

*Like a newly born man that only has nature in front of him*

*and walks in the forest with the joy of pursuing adventure;*

*always free and vital, he makes love as if he were an animal;*

*thoughtless, like a man satisfied with his own freedom.*

*Freedom is not being on a tree.*

*It is not the flight of a male fly.*

*Freedom is not free space.*

*Freedom is participation.*

*I would like to be free, as a man is free.*

*Like a man who needs to wander with his fantasies*

*and who finds this space only in his democracy,*

*that has the right to vote and spends his life delegating*

*and in receiving commands finds his new freedom.*

*Freedom is not being on a tree,*

*nor is it having an opinion.*

*Freedom is not free space.*

*Freedom is participation.*

*Freedom is not being on a tree.*

*It is not the flight of a male fly.*

*Freedom is not free space.*

*Freedom is participation.*

*I would like to be free, as a man is free.*

*Like the most evolved man that elevates himself with his own intelligence,*

*and defies nature with the crushing power of science,*

*with the enthusiasm to expand without limits in the cosmos*

*and convinced that the power of thought is the only freedom.*

*Freedom is not being on a tree,*

*nor is it a gesture or an invention.*

*Freedom is not free space.*

*Freedom is participation.*

*Freedom is not being on a tree.*

*It is not the flight of a male fly.*

*Freedom is not free space.*

*Freedom is participation.*

## BIOGRAPHY

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### Liliana Segre's testimony



Young Liliana

*[...] I remember one evening, it was at the end of summer in 1938: I had attended the first and the second year at primary school in my district and my father was trying to explain me that as we were Jewish, I could not go to school anymore. It was a break in my life, between what had happened before and what should happen after. It was very difficult for my father: I felt so similar to the other girls but I was considered different. [...]*

*The other little girls in my class pointed at me when I met them in the street and they told me that I could not go to school with them because I was Jewish. I felt and saw their mocking sniggers and I could not understand their behaviour. [...]*

*The racial laws were so humiliating because they had decided that our minority (35,000-37,000 Italian Jews) had to be declassified. [...] Our loneliness was tangible, our friends went away because it's easy to be friend when everything gets on well but not when you sink down. [...]*

*[...] As an adult I read about many things I hadn't known before, for example the guilty silence of the university teachers, when their Jewish colleagues were relieved of their duties only for being Jewish, instead of shouting and revolt (a lot of those professors were then welcomed with open arms in the USA for their experience and professionalism). Nobody spoke but it was also advantageous for them to take their teaching posts.*

*The tacit-approval was a feature of Fascism at that time; it doesn't matter, if after the war, anybody I met told me: "we were anti-fascist, we made many Jews escape" ... some of them*

*were anti-fascist and someone made many Jews escape but most of them went instead to piazza Venezia in Rome to applaud Mussolini.*

*The guilty silence around us was the worst thing of all. [...]*



Liliana Segre, President of the Association "The children of Shoah"

## **ACTIVITIES**

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### **Activity 1: teaching strategies**

- Introductory lesson about Indifference: the context, platform 21.
- Reading: Liliana Segre's testimony.
- Guided brainstorming. Proposal for the moral question: what would have happened if the people in Milan had reacted?
- Reading the texts: Antigone by Sophocles, Antigone by Brecht, Dante Inferno, Canto III, Freedom, Gaber.
- Guided brainstorming: reflection on the characters and their motivations.
- Prepare questions for the reflection to be shared, waiting for the final text.
- Production of the text and its representation.
- Final debate.



## Activity 2: students' activities

- Reading of some chosen texts about indifference and comparing Sophocles' "Antigone" to Brecht's interpretation.
- Reading Dante, canto III (Inferno) and Gaber's song.
- Workgroups: in small groups the students should answer to a questionnaire on the text to produce.
- **Questionnaire.** Questions for Discussion:
  1. Do you think the reason why Platform 21 at Milano Centrale has been recently transformed in a Memorial Place is that Indifference influenced the dramatic events in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?
  2. Which is the conflict represented in the Greek Tragedy?
  3. Sophocles' Antigone is indifferent according to you?
  4. What is the difference between Antigone's and the First Sister's behaviours?
  5. Do the First Sister's words reveal indifference? Why?
  6. According to you, why does Dante place the indifferent outside Hell?
  7. What is the moral question in the text?
  8. Find a correspondence between Dante's moral attitude towards the Indifferent and the events of his life ("Letter to a Florentine friend").
  9. From the texts you have read, what is the link between Indifference and Freedom?
- They could write a text on their own, they can represent it through multimedia.

## Activity 3: dramatisation

### **FREEDOM IS JUST PARTICIPATING**

**Narrator:** INDIFFERENCE, FEAR, FREEDOM. INDIFFERENCE: DISAPPOINTED and AIMLESS HOPE, BOREDOM, SPLEEN WITHOUT POETRY, lack of communication as a normal practice of life. FEAR: a suffering of life, a negativity towards other people, a clash with life. FREEDOM: It is not measurable, not containable, you can't define it: a definition of it could weaken its meaning. **Does Freedom also mean not siding, not choosing a position, not standing completely on one side?**

**Voice aside:**

I wish I were free, I wish I were free like a man

I wish I were free like a man.

Like a newborn man

A man just facing nature

And walking through a wood

Joyful to follow his adventure

### **ACT I**

**Narrator:** Berlin, April 1945. Two sisters are celebrating their brother's return from war. Suddenly they hear a terrible cry: "What is it?" Better safe than sorry. **It's better if we don't know.** They discover their brother's uniform in the wardrobe: he is not at war ...Has he escaped? But immediately another terrible revelation: their brother has been discovered by the SS, he is a deserter, he has been hanged: his body is outside.

**Second sister:** "Give me a knife to cut the rope, don't leave him hanging, let's take his body, let's try to bring him to life ..."

**First sister:** "Sister, leave your knife, you can't bring him to life. **If they see us with him, the same will happen to us...**"

**Narrator:** A SS member enters, he locates the two sisters' house and he understands it's the deserter's, he demands an explanation: **"It's clear that you know the traitor outside there..."**

**First sister:** "You can't say that sir, we don't really know that man!"

**Voice aside:**

I wish I were free, free like a man.

Like a man who needs

To travel with his imagination

And who finds his living space

Only in Democracy.

## **ACT II**

**Narrator:** Thebes, royal palace. Antigone, King Oedipus's daughter, has just seen his two brothers die..., one of them was trying to protect his town, governed by a new sovereign Creonte, the other, Polinice, was fighting against Thebes; for this reason the sovereign has decided not to bury him...

**Antigone (to her sister Ismene):** "Help me to bury, that dear body".

**Ismene:** **"Crazy, you are crazy if you are against Creonte"**

**Narrator:** Antigone buries Polinice on her own... she is caught in the act by a guard who reports her to the king.

**Creonte:** "You, who are looking downwards, I tell you: do you confess your guilt?"

**Antigone:** Yes, because it wasn't Zeus to forbid that burial ..., I didn't believe that your edicts could break the laws from Heaven, which have always been unbreakable and have always overlooked men".

**Creonte:** Nothing is worse than Anarchy, which destroys our town and upsets our families, and makes the armies escape from the fighting; only the REGULATIONS can SAVE LIVING PEOPLE FROM DEATH..."

**Narrator:** The king decides to punish Antigone and she is taken to a desert land, where she is kept without any food in a cave till her death.

**Antigone:** Without mourning, without friends, without wedding... I won't be able to see the bright sunlight anymore and nobody cries for my death... O lords of Thebes: look at your kings' last daughter and what a dishonour she has to bear just because she had mercy!

**Voice aside:**

I wish I were free, free like a man.

Like the most evolved man

Who raises with his own intelligence

And who challenges Nature

With the uncontested force of Science

### ACT III

**Narrator:** INFERNO, Canto III. Dante is wandering in search for Salvation for himself and all humanity. The Gate of Hell. He can hear pain cries: The Inefficient or Indifferent.

**Dante:**

"Master, what is this which now I hear?

what folk is this which seems by pain so vanquished?"

**Virgilio:**

"This miserable mode maintain the melancholy souls of those who lived withouten infamy or praise.

Commingled are they with that caitiff choir

of Angels, who have not rebellious been,

nor faithful were to God, but were for self.

The heavens espelled them, not to be less fair,

Nor them the nethermore abyss receives,

For glory none the damned would have for them”.

**Dante:**

“O Master, what so grievous is

To these, that maketh them lament so sore?”.

**Virgilio:**

“These have no longer any hope of death

**and this blind life of theirs is so debased,**

**They envious are of every other fate.**

No fame of them the world permits to be ;

Misericord and Justice both disdain them:

**let us not speak of them, but look, and pass”**

**Voice aside: LETTER XII, Dante to a Florentine friend, the 19th of May 1315.** In this letter Dante rejects the offer of returning to Florence following the amnesty for exiles in 1315, which he considered defamatory because he had to pay a sum of money to his persecutors and declared himself to be guilty. He refused and he never returned to Florence.

*“Fur be it from a man who preaches justice after having patiently endured injury to pay his money to those inflicting it, as though they were his benefactors. This is not the way to return to my country.*

*If another shall be found by you, or by others, that does not derogate from the fame and honour of Dante, that will I take with no lagging steps.*

*But if Florence is entered by no such path, then never will I enter Florence.”*

**Freedom is not staying on a tree**

**Nor it's a gesture or an invention**

## **Freedom is just participating**

Indifference vs responsibility

ISS Leardi, Casale Monferrato, Italy

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**Freedom is not a free space**

**Freedom is just participating**

## **Activity 4: participating or being indifferent**

**Focus on participation and responsibility in the choices made in life:**

- **Reflection:** the students ask questions and express their feelings towards the characters representing indifference or participation.
- **Questions for the final discussion:**
  1. Can Indifference foster the phenomenon of Holocaust denial?
  2. What do you think about people who turned their back not to see the Jews' deportation?
  3. Can we consider indifference a free choice in a man's life?
  4. As a teenager, have you ever experimented indifference?
  5. In your area and in your country have you ever seen or heard of events causing indifference? Make examples.
  6. How can you avoid and fight indifference?

## **Activity 5: final discussion**

Final discussion.



## **Activity 6: Shoah Memorial, Platform 21**

Guided visit to the Shoah Memorial, Platform 21, "Milano Centrale" Station.



## **Activity 7: final reflections**

Final reflections.

## **Activity 8: expansion**

The wall can be the symbol of a reflection about the meaning of life, the wall as the restriction of personal freedom; the wall of indifference becomes an extreme attempt to avoid differences, a limitation against the interferences of the others, as a reflection of a disease which affects modern society.

### **FOCUS**

The students, starting from the concept of indifference, reflect on the different connotations of the word “wall “.

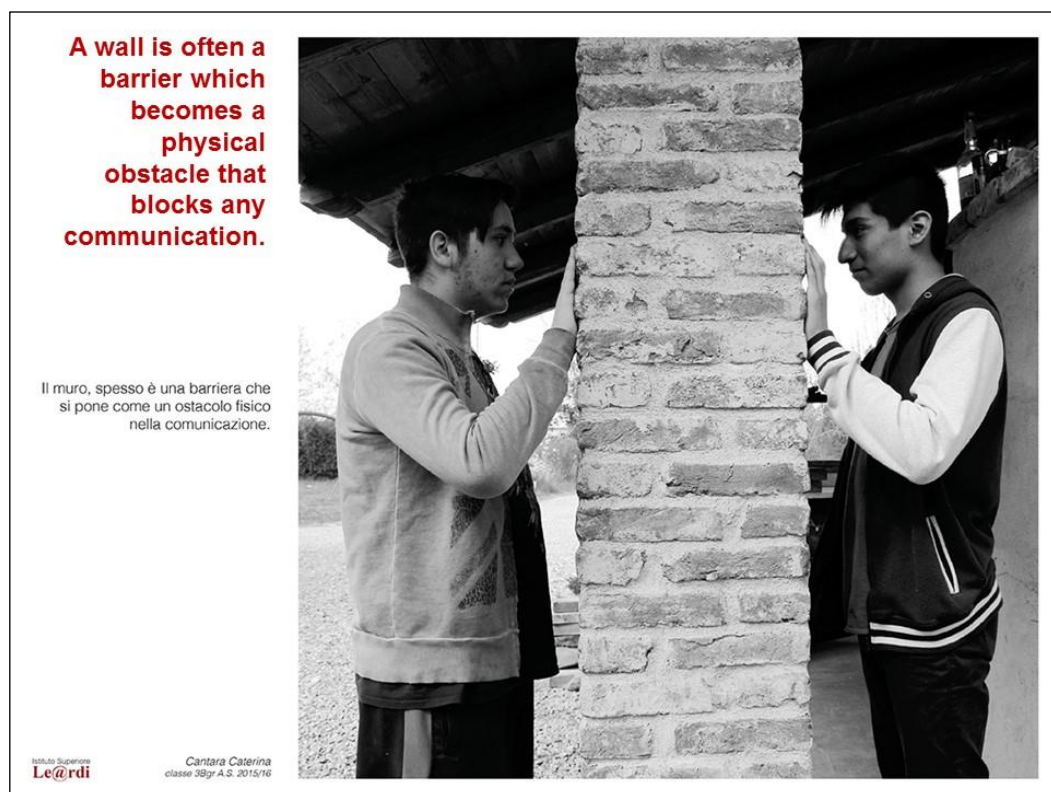
### Activity 9

A wall can help you in many ways: it can protect, shelter, defend and... separate.

The reflection on the different meanings of the word “Wall” by Jacques Pion, a French magazine reporter, has given a great impulse to the students who had been working with him for some months.

“While reflecting on the concept of “wall” with him, we shared the experience of a learning project which involved us and our teachers. We met Jacques Pion at a lecture in February and we started to explore the meanings of the word “wall” with him during the following months. We examined the subject matters linked to the word and, first of all, we crystallised our thoughts in a sequence of photos. Some simple shots, caught from our daily routine and put together to tell and show what there is beyond the surface of an image. It was a great opportunity for us. We studied, together with such a great master, the story and the route which bring to the creation of a picture and make it something which goes beyond the representation of reality.

At the Carmi Hall of the Jewish Community in Casale Monferrato, Jacques has exhibited the defense walls erected in an Israeli kibbutz, as students, we have exhibited our thoughts and our feelings.”



## Freedom is just participating

Indifference vs responsibility

ISS Leardi, Casale Monferrato, Italy

**Sometimes you  
don't realize that  
you have already  
gone beyond  
your wall.**

Tutto quello che dobbiamo  
superare è ciò che abbiamo già  
oltrepassato con la mente.

Istituto Superiore  
**Le@rdi**

Margaria Eleonora  
classe 3Bgr A.S. 2015/16

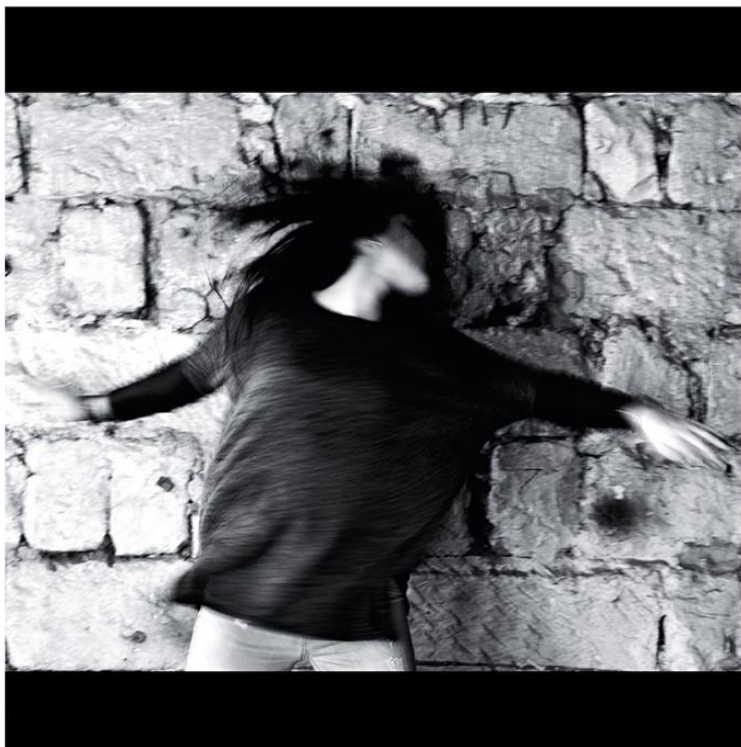


**A wall can exist  
only in your mind,  
if you eliminate it  
you can reach your  
aims.**

Il muro è una barriera posta  
all'interno della nostra mente solo  
staccandoci da essa riusciremo a  
raggiungere i nostri obiettivi.

Istituto Superiore  
**Le@rdi**

Vegro Giorgia  
classe 3Bgr A.S. 2015/16



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“MILANO CENTRALE” STATION, PLATFORM 21 – Memorial place

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