

E nga mana, e nga reo, e nga iwi E rau rangatira ma, Nau mai, haere mai, piki mai Tena kotou, tena kotou, tena tatou katoa

Ko Gael Ashworth tōku ingoa, ko ahau te tumuaki o te kura kōhine o te rāwhiti o te ūpoko o te ika.

When Boyd approached me to be part of this memorial opening today, I was really honoured and happy to accept. Over the time since we met, I have been reflecting on Anne's story and it's messages, and wondered in what ways could our students and other young people connect to Anne's experiences from so long ago and in what ways is her story relevant and meaningful to them today.

We are familiar with Anne's diary; a poignant and deeply personal record of her time in hiding in the 'secret annex' behind the movable bookshelf, at the back of her father's business premises in Amsterdam. The backdrop of her story; the Nazi persecution of the Jewish people in one of the worst genocides known. It is also, however, an inspiring account of a young person experiencing and exploring her developing identity as a young woman.

Anne, through her diary entries, details her daily struggles; tension in relationships between the families in hiding, quarrelling with her mother, her developing sexuality and even her first kiss. Although she is living under the constant fear of being discovered she is experiencing the same emotions as every other young person; isolation, loneliness, self discovery and love. We can connect with Anne as these are also our emotions and the experiences of many young people as they journey into adulthood. It is Anne's open and honest depiction of the struggles of being a young person that reveals the ordinariness of the human experience. However, it is her ability to convey these daily experiences within this historical backdrop that makes her so extraordinary.

As readers, her diary asks us to consider the themes of loneliness and isolation, discrimination and persecution; themes which are still prevalent in society today.

It is a call and a challenge for us all, to root out the inequity that we see around us.

An entry from Anne's diary dated April 11th 1944, reads:

“Let me be myself, then I am satisfied. I know that I'm a woman, a woman with inward strength and plenty of courage”. She was 14 years of age and there is no doubt that she was a wahine toa demonstrating great bravery, courage and tenacity of spirit.

Our young people are also faced with many challenges; and will themselves need to be courageous and strong. They live in a time of uncertainty for the future, however, I feel heartened and reassured by their response to step forward and represent their generation. They have a deep understanding of the issues and are brave enough to engage in whatever ways they can. They show aroha and compassion for others and are accepting of difference and diversity. They are social activists and are prepared to speak out and take action against injustice. It is these actions that stifle the ignorance and prejudice that lead to the type of discrimination and persecution that Anne experienced.

It is also for them a time of personal change and transition; a time to be brave and bold, build relationships, speak out, step into their power and take part in something bigger than themselves for the good of others.

In spite of the harrowing circumstances, Anne had an unshakeable hope for the future and dreams for her life beyond the war. Tragically, her future was cut short and this in itself is another message for us all, a call to take hold of all of the opportunities that each day presents us with, and fire it with all of the passion, hope and creativity that we can.

I would now like to ask Rāwhiti our auditioned choir to perform I Te Pō

