

Graphic Novels about the Holocaust





Photo: Elementary school "Momčilo Zivjinić" in Mladenovac - eighth grade students work with the educational graphic novel Ester

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“From the Novi Sad Raid to Auschwitz - Novi Sad the Capital of the Remembrance Culture”
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Illustrations from the collection “Ester” www.ester.rs

The Handbook for Educators is available at www.terraforming.org



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The culture of remembrance can be abused for the purpose of inflaming nationalism and maintaining fear and hate. A true, sincere and courageous culture of remembrance deals with the past in a way that reverently preserves the memory of victims, but at the same time promotes civil and human rights, pluralism, and critical thinking, those democratic and social values that these terrible crimes of the past warn that, both as a society and as individuals, we must personally and actively nurture, strengthen and defend.

With educational graphic novels Ester we want to contribute to such a culture of remembrance.

Innovative educational material about the Holocaust

Ester is a unique educational material which Terraforming has been developing and improving since 2016. Its most important part is a collection of dramatized stories in the form of graphic novels about those who were persecuted and killed by the Nazi occupation forces and their collaborators during World War II.

These stories are often told from children's or young people's perspectives. We get to know their families, their pre-war lives, and how they suffered during the German occupation and the Holocaust. Based on authentic historical events and people, the stories rely on archival documents, photographs, testimonies and other historical material.

Throughout the creation of the novels, we were guided by two key principles: be true to the historical facts, and produce world-class educational material that adheres to the highest standards, in line with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) recommendations for teaching and learning about the Holocaust, as well as the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education.

To support teachers and other educators, we have written "Guidelines for using graphic novels, literature and archival material in teaching about the Holocaust" and made them available for download from our website.

The *Ester* collection of educational graphic novels has three main objectives:

1. Deepen the knowledge about the Holocaust as an unprecedented historical event that forever changed the face of Europe, about the processes that led to the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder, and the scope of its everlasting consequences;
2. Preserve the memory of the victims;
3. Develop critical thinking and democratic competencies.

There's also a fourth objective: to contribute towards a meaningful, genuine, and

honest culture of remembrance that brings together memorialization, research, and education, raises awareness about the relevance of these historical events for the new generations, contributes to critical thinking, and strengthens democracy.

Dramatization of history

The events depicted in the *Ester* graphic novels are authentic and supported by relevant historical records and accounts. However, the stories have been dramatized and adapted for the target audience and to better serve the novels' educational purpose. The novels were dramatized with specific educational goals in mind and include elements that enable the teaching and learning about key topics such as resistance, collaboration, help and rescue efforts, refugees, looting of Jewish property, Jewish customs and culture, life, culture and persecution of the Roma, re-building of life after the war, long-lasting consequences of the Holocaust, and many more. In some case, documented experiences of several families were combined into one story. We thought it was important to capture and present these dramatic, tragic and emotional events and human experiences that serve to improve the education about the Holocaust.

It is important to stress that all such interventions were made with utmost respect towards historical facts, and in consultation with a team of specialists in order to ensure accurate representation of historical events at all times

Ester graphic novels are based on as many historical facts and details about the main characters that we could find and establish through our research. Our goal was not to tell particular personal stories but rather combine a collection of different experiences and fates in a format suitable for education.

In this way, we present material that aims to inspire learners so that it improves emotional engagement and opens up possibilities for further creative and investigative work.

We found inspiration in a whole lot of art forms that deal with this topic. Among

others, author David Albahari, who said this about his book *Gotz and Meyer*:

“The novel Gotz and Meyer is based on historical facts from a number of sources but it is still a story that adheres to the facts only as much as they serve its narrative, because by describing the tragic fate of one family in Serbia, I described, in a symbolic way, the fate of the whole Jewish community.”

Working with experts and artists

While working on the Ester collection, we consulted various specialists, primarily from Serbia but also from Israel, Germany, Austria, The Netherlands, the USA and other countries. The research and advisory team that contributed to the project consisted of historians, archivists, museum workers, teachers and educators, survivors, Jewish and Roma culture and tradition experts, respectively, as well as other specialists, depending on the issues we needed to address.

For example, while working on the novel “Breaking into a gallop” we consulted colleagues from the Roma community, Roma music and Roma folk tale specialists, collected recipes and expressions in Romani language; an agronomist advised us about farming in the Srem region before the war, and we also interviewed the contemporary inhabitants of the Molovin village. A biologist helped us identify the bird species common to Srem.

All these details are important and contribute both to the authenticity of the story and to the ultimate educational goals.

Once we had finalised the dramatization of the story and written a synopsis divided into “scenes”, we prepared carefully designed sketches and introduced illustrators into the project. They had a difficult task – on the one hand, they were required to adhere strictly to the instructions, which often included minute details, but on the other hand, they were not to compromise their creativity and artistic expression. They had access to historical photographs and other relevant material that we prepared for each particular scene.

How did people from a particular social group dress at that time? What was a family's home life like? What kind of school uniform did students of a particular school wear in 1925, or in 1935? On which arm did Jews have to wear a yellow ribbon? To find all these answers, we had to research both local and international sources, and we found historical newspapers from that period to be most helpful, especially when researching sections about everyday life.

New opportunities and formats for teaching and learning about the Holocaust

The Ester collection presents a variety of often entirely new opportunities for learning about the life before and during WW2, about local history and culture, specifically about Jewish and Roma culture respectively, as well as about antisemitism, the causes and consequences of the Holocaust.

The novels are available in a digital format on the website www.ester.rs

Each page contains one illustration, ie one scene of the story. Each scene includes the precise date and its exact location marked on a map, related historical photographs and documents, and assignments for further study. A glossary of lesser-known words was added wherever necessary.

The stories and illustrations are multi-layered, including a multitude of details that can serve as a starting point for further research of historical events and other facets of everyday life before WW2, such as technology, culture, film, sport, fashion, etc.

In addition to the main characters whose fate the stories follow, various significant historical characters make shorter appearances in the novels, creating opportunities for students to investigate further who they are. Such as Hilda Dajč, Sava Šumanović, Django Reinhardt, Apolonija Laubert, Jelena Demajo, Geca Kon, Micky Jazz Orchestra, as well as known collaborators, German commanders, and others.

Illustrations often depict prominent, easily recognisable public spaces in Serbian cities where the story takes place. In addition, each illustration comes with a map

that shows the exact locations. By establishing the direct connection between these historical events and their immediate physical, social and cultural surroundings, the stories ignite interest and motivation among learners, which in turn improves the process of comprehension and learning.

The material opens up a number of opportunities for teaching in the field, at the authentic locations. Students learn that right there, in their neighborhoods, there are places of suffering and persecution, as well as places where people went about their everyday life, a life which has unfortunately disappeared. By visiting these locations, students learn how this history directly affected the shaping of the post-holocaust society and our societies today.

Although local historical events take center stage in the novels, we took great care to place them in the broader European historical context, both in the stories and in the research assignments.

Students can analyse the illustrations and the text by doing research on their own or in a group, using online and offline archives of newspapers, photographs and other historical records.

By working directly with the archival documents and understanding the research process, students learn the importance, and the methodology, of checking the sources, be they historical records or other types of information. This helps develop general media literacy and directly contributes to addressing Holocaust denial and distortion, manipulation and politicization of history, which is one of the most significant challenges facing European remembrance culture.

Another important method, specific to graphic educational novels, is the comparison of illustrations representing the same location (or people) in different historical periods – for example, before and after the occupation.

Because each illustration is accompanied by a series of research assignments and discussion topics, teachers can select the assignments that are appropriate to their students, depending on their age, interests and skills.

Directly or indirectly, the novels raise many complex issues: the cruelty of the perpetrators, motives of the collaborators, the passivity of silent bystanders, motivation and courage of those who resisted and helped the victims, etc. Supported and guided by teachers, students can reflect over and discuss various complicated matters. These discussions foster the development of critical thinking, which is one of the key goals of education about the Holocaust.

Promoting the work of historians and archivists

The material aims to introduce to the learners the professions of historians and archivists, as well as the foundations of the historical research. For this reason, we devoted special attention to explaining how particular documents were created, preserved, how to identify and use them.

The novels “The Archivists and the Forgotten Boxes” and “The Making of the Educational Graphic Novel about the Novi Sad Raid” are devoted to archival and historical research.

An important aspect of our graphic novel work is the development of professional capacities of archivist, librarian and museum workers, particularly in the context of identifying and preserving Holocaust records, as well as introducing of the concept of archives pedagogy and the fundamental principles of Holocaust education.

The aim of “The Holocaust, European values and Local History” project was to develop and introduce sustainable methodologies and tools for an innovative approach to archival pedagogy, especially in smaller local archives. We also aim to inspire and enable archivists to create their own educational programmes about the Holocaust, based on their own archival material and local history, and to present local microhistories to a global audience.

At the same time, we strive to contribute towards archival pedagogy becoming accepted as a standard approach to archivist work and being part of local archives’ ongoing activities.

Addressing the rise of antisemitism

An important objective of our educational graphic novels is to broaden the knowledge about antisemitism as a historical phenomenon and a form of xenophobia and racism, as well as to raise awareness about the contemporary antisemitism in today's society.

Today, antisemitism is on the rise across Europe, especially on social networks and among certain football supporter groups, but also in the streets, in the media, in education, and even in parliaments. It is therefore extremely important to educate the young generation about its danger, so that they are able to recognise, reject and counter antisemitism in all forms.

Bringing together 6 partners from Germany, Poland, Greece and Serbia, the HANNAH project focuses on the promotion of history of Jewish communities across Europe, the enhancement of Holocaust remembrance and the fight against antisemitism through capacity-building training, awareness raising and policymaking contribution.

The objective of the HANNAH project is to promote Jewish life and contribute to better understanding of Jewish traditions, the history and contribution of Jewish people in Europe before and after the Holocaust, with a focus on local contexts of Dresden, Hamburg, Athens, Thessaloniki, Krakow, and Novi Sad.

As part of the project activities, we designed a graphic novel titled "The Making of the Educational Graphic Novel about the Novi Sad Raid", and created updated guidelines for teachers on how to use graphic novels in education about antisemitism and the Holocaust in an international context.

The Holocaust, European Values and Local History: Local Archives in the European Historical and Cultural Mosaic

Supported by: International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance IHRA, International Visegrad Fund, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, and the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia

Information: www.terraforming.org



HANNAH - Challenging and Debunking Antisemitic Myths

Supported by: the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) program of the European Union, the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia and the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina - Provincial Secretariat for Finance.

Information: www.hannah-project.eu





A STORY ABOUT THE RED RACE CAR | scene 1, A Day at the Races

TIME: Sunday, September 3, 1939 | PLACE: Pariska Street, Kalemegdan, Belgrade

CONCEPT, DRAMATIZATION AND TEXT: Miško Stanišić

ILLUSTRATOR: Silva Vujović (Belgrade)



A STORY ABOUT THE RED RACE CAR | scene 10, Departure to Sajmište

TIME: Monday, December 8, 1941 | PLACE: Apartment in Dobračina 18; Special Police for Jews, 21 George Washington Street; and near the collapsed King Alexander Bridge, Belgrade

CONCEPT, DRAMATIZATION AND TEXT: Miško Stanišić

ILLUSTRATOR: Silva Vujović (Belgrade)



THE BALL IN THE SNOW | scene 4, Shoemaker's Shop

TIME: Tuesday, September 3, 1929 | PLACE: Formerly Žitni Square, today Marija Trandafil Square 3 in Novi Sad

CONCEPT AND DRAMATIZATION: Miško Stanišić

ILLUSTRATOR: Dušan Zaklan (Novi Sad)



THE BALL IN THE SNOW | scene 13, Golden Fields

TIME: Friday, July 25, 1941 | PLACE: Farms and fields near Čenej

CONCEPT AND DRAMATIZATION: Miško Stanišić

ILLUSTRATOR: Ivan Perić (Belgrade)



THE BALL IN THE SNOW

scene 10,

The Kladovo Transport in Novi Sad

TIME: Saturday, December 23, 1939

PLACE: The port on the Danube and
the center of Novi Sad

CONCEPT AND

DRAMATIZATION: Miško Stanišić

ILLUSTRATOR: Danijela Stojić

(Hrtkovci)



THE RUNNING SHOES | scene 3, Schoolyard Race

TIME: Friday, September 27, 1940 | PLACE: Former Civic School, today's Electrical Engineering School "Nikola Tesla", Maksim Gorki Street 7, Pančevo

CONCEPT, DRAMATIZATION AND TEXT: Miško Stanišić

ILLUSTRATOR: Tiberiu Beka (Pančevo)



THE BACKPACK | scene 6, The Bombing of Belgrade

TIME: Sunday, April 6, 1941 | PLACE: Belgrade, National Library, Church of the Ascension, Belgrade Zoo

CONCEPT, DRAMATIZATION AND TEXT: Miško Stanišić (according to the testimony of Aleksandar Nećak)

ILLUSTRATOR: Marija Maksimović - Marillu (Belgrade)



THE BACKPACK | scene 6, Fritz was a Kind German

TIME: Spring of 1942 | PLACE: Somewhere in Senjak, Belgrade

CONCEPT, DRAMATIZATION AND TEXT: Miško Stanišić (according to the testimony of Aleksandar Nećak)

ILLUSTRATOR: Marija Maksimović - Marillu (Belgrade)



BREAKING INTO A GALLOP | scene 7, Twilight
TIME: Early 1930s | PLACE: The village of Molovin in Srem

CONCEPT, DRAMATIZATION AND TEXT: Miško Stanišić
ILLUSTRATOR: Jelena Marunić (Novi Sad)



BREAKING INTO A GALLOP | scene 22, The Last Station
TIME: July 1942 | PLACE: Railway station in Šid

CONCEPT, DRAMATIZATION AND TEXT: Miško Stanišić
ILLUSTRATOR: Marija Ranković (Kosijerić)



THE FAMILY PHOTO | scene 2, Shabbat

TIME: Friday, November 22, 1940 | PLACE: The Demajo family's apartment in Molerova Street 53 in Belgrade

CONCEPT AND DRAMATIZATION: Miško Stanišić

ILLUSTRATOR: Ivan Stojanović - Fiki (Leskovac)



THE FAMILY PHOTO | scene 11, Casualty Report

TIME: Wednesday, August 22, 1945 | PLACE: City District Office 1, Belgrade

CONCEPT AND DRAMATIZATION: Miško Stanišić

ILLUSTRATOR: Ivan Stojanović - Fiki (Leskovac)



THE ARCHIVISTS AND THE FORGOTTEN BOX | Ester
 TIME: Summer 2015 | PLACE: The Historical Archive of Belgrade

CONCEPT AND DRAMATIZATION: Miško Stanišić
 ILLUSTRATOR: Gabriel Kousbroek (Amsterdam)



THE MAKING OF A GRAPHIC NOVEL ABOUT THE NOVI SAD RAID | scene 11, An Interview with a Survivor
TIME: Summer 2021 | PLACE: Somewhere in Novi Sad

CONCEPT AND DRAMATIZATION: Miško Stanišić
ILLUSTRATOR: Sandra Janjatović (Novi Sad)

Experiences to date

Experiences with students have been very positive. Teacher training and preparation is certainly necessary, both on teaching about the Holocaust in general, as well as on using graphic novels in education of this kind.

It is important to develop the capacity of teachers in the field of education about antisemitism, where there is a lack of knowledge and experience. Because of this, education about antisemitism is neglected, or it is wrongly assumed that the topic is covered by Holocaust education.

After positive experiences in working with archives, libraries and museums, we will continue to support their active involvement in educational processes through the use of our own material on local history.

The next step: Ester Storyboard

We have developed a digital application that will aid students and teachers in making a synopsis (storyboard) for their own original graphic novel based on local historical events during the Holocaust. The app offers tools and instructions for teachers and students to conduct historical research in their environment, including visits to local archives, libraries and museums, talks with experts, meetings with survivors or researching preserved testimonies and visiting authentic locations and places of life or suffering. During this process, students develop a storyboard for a short graphic novel. Writing and illustrating a short story can also involve teachers of language, fine arts, and many others.

The app is multilingual and can be used by students in various countries to share their research and graphic novels with each other.

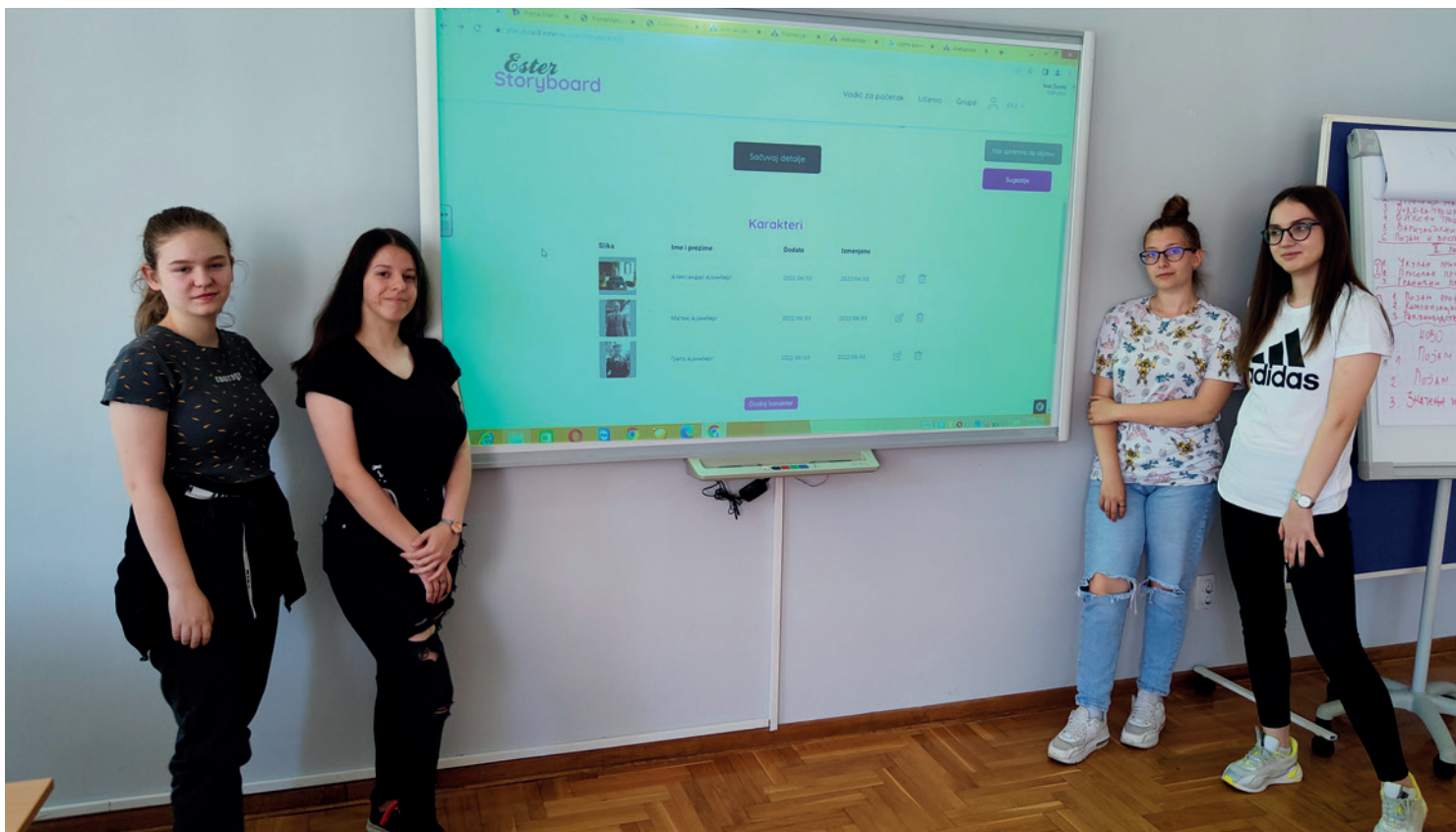


Photo: First and second grade students of the School of Economics and Commerce in Sopot, entering data about the sources and characters for their original graphic novel "Letters to Matvej", during an Ester Storyboard app workshop led by history teacher Ivan Životić.

Ester: Young People Remember - Digital Tools for the Creation of Educational Graphic Novels about the Holocaust

Supported by: The Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future EVZ and the German Federal Foreign Office

Information: www.ester.rs

Ester.RS

The program “From the Novi Sad Raid to Auschwitz -
Novi Sad the Capital of the Remembrance Culture”
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Archives of Vojvodina, Novi Sad

Centropa, Hamburg

Cultural Center of Novi Sad

European Association for the Preservation and Promotion of Jewish Heritage and
Culture (AEPJ)

Historical Archive of the City of Novi Sad

Jewish community of Novi Sad

Jewish Museum of Greece, Athens

Matica Srpska Library, Novi Sad

Museum of the Jews of Galicia, Krakow

Youth and Culture (JKPV), Dresden



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The Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) program of the European Union through the project “HANNAH: Challenging and Debunking Antisemitic Myths”



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TERRA FORMING

www.terraforming.org

Terraforming is committed to promoting and improving teaching and learning about the Holocaust and combating antisemitism, antigypsyism and other forms of xenophobia.

Terraforming is an independent non-governmental and non-profit organization from Novi Sad, founded in 2008, with partners, associates and project activities throughout Europe.

Terraforming develops pedagogical methods and teaching materials by combining the best experiences of contemporary pedagogy with new media and technologies, introducing new actors into knowledge transfer processes, and facilitating multidisciplinary projects that foster cooperation and exchange of experiences between leading Serbian and international institutions in the field of remembrance culture.



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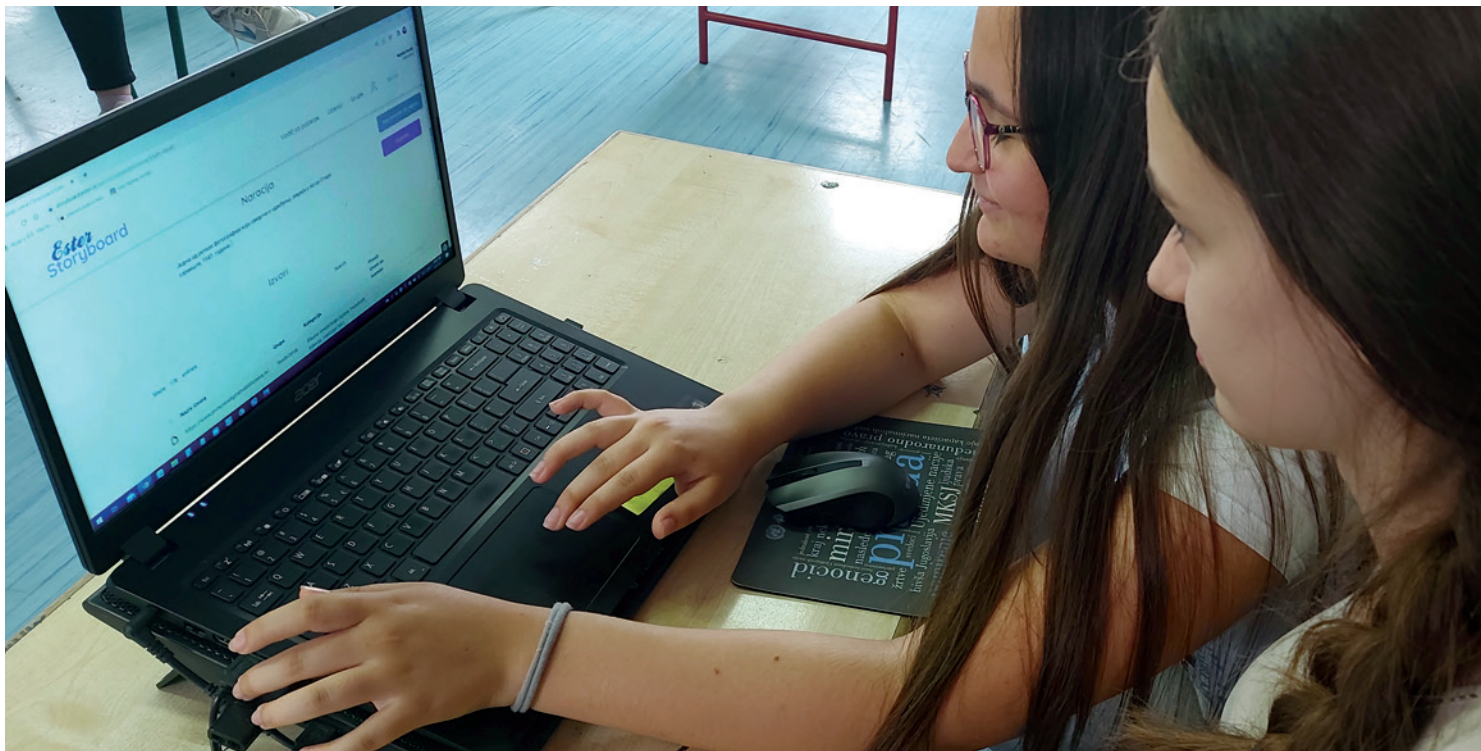


Photo: Elementary school "Momčilo Zivojinović" in Mladenovac - Eighth grade students are developing their own graphic novel with the help of the Ester Storyboard app. The project is led by history teacher Nataša Kostić, with history teachers Stanislava Blagojević and Milijana Rajić Vidović. Their novel is called "We were faster than death" dedicated to the family of Natalija Kovačević Tajtacak, who worked as a teacher at the Women's Craft School in Mladenovac before the Second World War.

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