

# History that comes to you

A Thunder Bay high school teacher has a high-tech mobile classroom roll into town.

BY STEFAN DUBOWSKI



The Holodomor bus uses technology to raise awareness about the Ukrainian genocide.

**THE CHALLENGE** Expand students' appreciation for history.

**THE SOLUTION** Invite the Holodomor National Awareness Tour to school and introduce students to a significant, yet little-known, event.

**LESSONS LEARNED** Rory Bain, OCT, teaches Grade 10, 11 and 12 history at Superior Collegiate & Vocational Institute in Thunder Bay, Ont. Last year, while he was teaching at Sir Winston Churchill Collegiate & Vocational Institute, Bain wanted his Grade 10 history students to internalize the idea that what happened in the past informs the present. So when he heard about the Holodomor National Awareness Tour — a bus transformed into a high-tech mobile classroom with lessons and activities about the Ukrainian genocide — he was intrigued.

“Holodomor” is Ukrainian for “death inflicted by starvation.” In the 1930s, Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union and the government set extremely high quotas for the amount of grain farmers had to produce. Many farmers

didn't meet the mark. As punishment, the government demanded fines in the form of meat and potatoes, leaving farmers with little to feed themselves — effectively starving them. The authorities also prohibited farmers from leaving the country. Millions died. For decades, the government denied that the Holodomor happened.

Sure that most of his students were unaware, Bain scheduled the Holodomor National Awareness Tour to come to his school. Teacher and students boarded the bus and a guide walked them through activities. There was a documentary about the event shown on the built-in large screen. Then there was group work using iPads: students investigated photos, survivor interviews, news and stats. At the end, they shared their findings and considered questions such as: Why is historical documentation important? Why are survivor testimonials important? What do you take away from this experience?

**OBSERVATIONS** Bain says students learned big lessons: that primary

sources of information can be crucial; that governments can suppress information; that what's happening today is linked with the past (notably Russia's annexation of Crimea being connected with the countries' histories).

The teacher learned, too. Bain says he saw how technology is especially effective. “Putting the Holodomor in a technological setting [helps to] reach more people more intimately.”

He has had the tour come twice, and he expects to do it again. “I think we have a responsibility to highlight not only the issues of the day but also the ones that aren't as well known. Isn't that the point of teaching? To give people knowledge so they can do something with it.”

**HELPFUL HINT** Use the fact that the mobile classroom is coming to your community to promote awareness of Ukrainian culture. Rory Bain, OCT, organized a week of Ukrainian food and fun when he had the Holodomor tour visit Thunder Bay. **PS**

*The College's professional advisory Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media ([oct-oeo.ca/ecomm](http://oct-oeo.ca/ecomm)) guides members' professional judgment in the use of technology.*

## YOU CAN DO IT TOO!

Follow these steps:

- 1) Visit the Holodomor National Awareness Tour website ([holodomortour.ca](http://holodomortour.ca)) to book the mobile classroom.
- 2) On that site, visit “For Teachers” for curriculum links and other educational resources.
- 3) Have class discussions about genocide to prep students for the tour.
- 4) Connect with other teachers and people in your municipality so not only your students, but also people in the broader community, can visit the tour and learn.