

# *Hand Book for teachers*

***Guidelines for Teaching about the Holocaust***  
*documents of the Education Working Group*



The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research is an organisation composed of representatives of governments and NGOs. Its purpose is to place political and social leaders' support behind the need for Holocaust education, remembrance and research. It gathers diplomats, officers from ministries of Education and Culture, educators, academics and museum experts from more than eighteen countries<sup>1</sup> in order to promote best practices in Holocaust research, pedagogy and commemoration.

Members must be committed to the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, and must accept the principles adopted by the Task Force regarding membership. They must also be committed to the implementation of national policies and programs in support of Holocaust education, remembrance, and research.

In that regard, Task Force experts have compiled guidelines to assist teachers in preparing their courses on the Holocaust. Several institutions of worldwide renown such as the Imperial War Museum in London, the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the House of the Wannsee Conference in Berlin, the Auschwitz State museum, the French and Italian Centres for Contemporary Jewish Documentation and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington<sup>2</sup> have participated in this work in order to provide teachers and educators with clear and simple advice pertinent in various teaching and national contexts.

The documents offered here are not intended to be prescriptive; Holocaust education continues to develop in response to new academic and pedagogical research. We recognise that there are different ways to approach teaching and learning about the Holocaust and teachers must take account of the particular learning needs of individual students.

These guidelines are an effort to share the reflections of Holocaust educators with many years experience in teaching this subject, and to promote approaches to teaching the Holocaust that have proved effective in different national contexts. They are the result of a positive and open exchange of views, of self-critical reflection, and debate. Those of us involved in developing these guidelines feel that we have gained from the opportunity to learn from each other and many of us are now using them within our own institutions and teacher training programmes. We hope that they will help you in the difficult but crucial task to teach young generations one of the most significant events of human history, in a time when racism, antisemitism and xenophobia are still endangering the peace of our societies.

Ambassador Giorgio Franchetti Pardo, Task Force Chairman, Italy  
Paul Salmons, Chair of the Task Force Education Working Group, United Kingdom

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<sup>1</sup> In 2004, the Task Force member countries are: Argentina, Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, The United Kingdom, The United States. Other countries are participating as well, although not as full members: Croatia, Romania, Slovakia.

<sup>2</sup> You will find the complete list of non-governmental organizations affiliated to the Task Force on our Website: <http://taskforce.ushmm.org>

## Why Teach about the Holocaust?

The objective of teaching any subject is to engage the intellectual curiosity of students in order to inspire critical thought and personal growth. Therefore it is essential that educators consider questions of rationale whenever they approach any subject.

When educators take the time to consider the reasons for their lessons on the Holocaust, they will be more likely to select content that speaks to their students' interests and that provides a clearer understanding of a complex history.

The following considerations may encourage reflection on the reasons for teaching about the Holocaust:

1. The Holocaust was a watershed event, not only for the 20th century but also in the entire history of humanity. It was an unprecedented attempt to murder a whole people and to extinguish its culture. The Holocaust should be studied because it fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilization.
2. A thorough study of the Holocaust helps students think about the use and abuse of power, and the roles and responsibilities of individuals, organizations, and nations when confronted with human rights violations. It can heighten awareness of the potential for genocide in the contemporary world.
3. Study of the Holocaust assists students in developing an understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism, antisemitism, and stereotyping in any society. It helps students develop an awareness of the value of diversity in a pluralistic society and encourages sensitivity to the positions of minorities.
4. The Holocaust demonstrated how a modern nation could utilize its technological expertise and bureaucratic infrastructure to implement destructive policies ranging from social engineering to genocide.
5. The Holocaust provides a context for exploring the dangers of remaining silent and indifferent in the face of the oppression of others.
6. As students gain insight into the many historical, social, religious, political, and economic factors that cumulatively resulted in the Holocaust, they gain awareness of the complexity of the historical process and a perspective on how a convergence of factors can contribute to the disintegration of democratic values. Students come to understand that it is the responsibility of citizens in a democracy to learn to identify the danger signals and to know when to react.
7. The Holocaust has become a central theme in the culture of many countries. This is reflected in media representation and popular culture. Holocaust education can offer students historical knowledge and skills needed to understand and evaluate these cultural manifestations.

## What to Teach about the Holocaust?

In general, teaching about the Holocaust should:

1. Advance knowledge about this unprecedented destruction
2. Preserve the memory of those who suffered
3. Encourage educators and students to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust and as they apply in today's world

These aims can be clearly seen in the following definitions of the Holocaust:

- Under the cover of the Second World War, for the sake of their "new order," the Nazis sought to destroy all the Jews of Europe. For the first time in history, industrial methods were used for the mass extermination of a whole people. Six million were murdered, including 1,500,000 children. This event is called the Holocaust.

The Nazis enslaved and murdered millions of others as well. Gypsies, people with physical and mental disabilities, Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, trade unionists, political opponents, prisoners of conscience, homosexuals, and others were killed in vast numbers.

Imperial War Museum, London, UK

- The Holocaust refers to a specific genocidal event in twentieth-century history: the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims -6 million were murdered; Gypsies, the handicapped, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents, also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C., USA

- The Holocaust was the murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators. Between the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 and the end of the war in Europe in May 1945, Nazi Germany and its accomplices strove to murder every Jew under their domination. Because Nazi discrimination against the Jews began with Hitler's accession to power in January 1933, many historians consider this the start of the Holocaust era. The Jews were not the only victims of Hitler's regime, but they were the only group that the Nazis sought to destroy entirely.

Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, Israel

**Teaching about the Holocaust can and must be different in various contexts. In order to see the differences between the Holocaust and other genocides, comparisons should be carefully distinguished and similarities also should be articulated.**

When teaching about the Holocaust, it is helpful to address three basic questions:

1. Why shall I teach about the Holocaust?
2. What shall I teach about the Holocaust?
3. How shall I teach about the Holocaust?

The first question involves issues of rationale. The second question involves selection of information, while the third question deals with appropriate pedagogical approaches based on the student group. These guidelines do not address the first and third questions. These questions will be addressed in other guidelines.

## What to Teach about the Holocaust?

In addition to history, the Holocaust can also be approached through other disciplines, such as literature, psychology, religious studies, and others.

As national and local commemorative activities are seen to be of value, it is advised to provide educational support to such activities.

The study of the Holocaust must be examined within the context of European history as a whole. We encourage educators to also examine the local context for this history. Educators should provide context for the events of the Holocaust by including information about:

- Antisemitism
- Jewish life in Europe before the Holocaust
- The aftermath of World War I
- The Nazi rise to power

As for the historical themes or topics connected with teaching about the Holocaust, educators might examine the following, among others, when constructing lessons on the Holocaust. As they do so, they may consider this history from the perspectives of the:

- Victims
- Perpetrators
- Collaborators
- Bystanders
- Rescuers

### 1933-1939

- Dictatorship in National Socialist Germany
- Jewry in the Third Reich
- Early stages of persecution
- The first concentration camps
- World response

### 1939-1945

- World War II in Europe
- Nazi racist ideologies and policies
- "Euthanasia" program
- Persecution and murder of Jews
- Persecution and murder of non-Jewish victims
- Jewish reactions to Nazi policies
- Ghettos
- Mobile killing squads
- Expansion of the camp system
- Killing centers
- Collaboration
- Resistance
- Rescue
- World response
- Death marches
- Liberation

### Aftermath

- Postwar trials
- Displaced persons camps and emigration

The purpose of these guidelines is to strengthen teaching about the Holocaust. The teaching will be different from country to country, from school to school, and from time to time. Therefore, it is understood that it is important to stress the need for self-evaluation of teaching efforts by all educators.



## How to Teach about the Holocaust?

There can be no single 'correct' way of teaching any subject, no ideal methodology that is appropriate for all teachers and students. What is offered here are guidelines and advice that might prove useful to schoolteachers in constructing their own schemes of work, taking account the learning needs of individual students. It is an attempt to draw on current best practice from a number of institutions with expertise in teaching the Holocaust, to address some of the concerns teachers have about how to

approach this very difficult subject, and to present possible ways forward.

Holocaust education stands upon advances in research and has changed significantly over the last three decades; this document seeks to reflect a continuing process of pedagogical development and improvement and, as such, is not intended as the final word on this subject.

### Summary

- The Holocaust can be successfully taught to students; do not be afraid to approach this subject
- Define the term Holocaust
- Create a positive learning environment, with an active pedagogy and a student-centred approach
- Individualise the history by translating statistics into personal stories
- Use witness testimony to make this history more 'real' to your students
- A cross-curricular approach will enrich your students' understanding of the Holocaust
- Contextualise the history
- Give broad and balanced coverage to this subject
- Be precise in your use of language and urge your students to do the same
- Distinguish between the history of the Holocaust and the lessons that might be learned from that history
- Avoid simple answers to a complex history
- Provide your students with access to primary sources
- Students should be alerted to the fact that the perpetrators produced much of the evidence of the Holocaust
- Encourage your students to critically analyse different interpretations of the Holocaust
- Be responsive to the appropriateness of written and visual content and do not use horrific imagery to engage your students in a study of the Holocaust
- Avoid comparing the pain of any one group with that of another
- Allow your students to explore a variety of responses of the victims, including the many forms of resistance to the Nazis
- Take care not to define the Jewish people solely in terms of the Holocaust
- Indicate that the Holocaust was not inevitable
- Do not attempt to explain away the perpetrators as 'inhuman monsters'
- Be careful to distinguish between the perpetrators of the past and present day societies in Europe and elsewhere
- Encourage your students to study local, regional, national and global history and memory
- Ask your students to participate in and reflect upon national and local traditions of commemoration and remembrance
- Select appropriate learning activities and avoid using simulations that encourage students to identify with perpetrators or victims
- Avoid legitimising the denial of the past
- Be aware of the potential and also the limitations of all instructional materials, including the Internet
- Distinguish between historical and contemporary events and avoid historical comparisons
- Be responsive to the concerns of your students

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## How to Teach about the Holocaust?

### ***The Holocaust can be successfully taught to students; do not be afraid to approach this subject***

Many teachers are reluctant to explore the history of the Holocaust with their students because of the perceived difficulties in teaching the subject. They are overwhelmed by how to convey the scale of the tragedy, the enormity of the numbers involved and the depths to which humanity can sink. They wonder how to move their students without traumatising them; they worry about their students' possible reactions to this subject and how to deal with 'inappropriate' behaviour in the classroom, such as giggling or expressing antisemitic and racist remarks.

Do not be afraid to approach this subject as, while it may appear daunting, experience has shown that the Holocaust can be successfully taught to students and may have very positive results.

### ***Define the term Holocaust***

A clear definition of the term 'Holocaust' is essential. Many teachers apply this term in a very broad sense to encompass all victims of Nazi persecution. Yet most historians of the period use a more precise definition. (See the 'What to teach' guidelines.)

Students should be aware that for many people the term 'Holocaust' is problematic. A holocaust is a biblical sacrifice and, from a Christian theological standpoint, it turns the mass murder of the Jews into a form of martyrdom. But there was nothing 'holy' about the Holocaust. Other terms should also be used with care. Speaking of the 'Final Solution' means taking up the killers' language; the word 'genocide' refers to the racial world conception of the Nazis. Many prefer the use of the Hebrew word 'Shoah' - meaning catastrophe - which is not loaded with religious meaning.

### ***Create a positive learning environment, with an active pedagogy and a student-centred approach***

The Holocaust challenges many assumptions that young people may have about the nature of society, progress, civilization and human behaviour. Students may have defensive reactions, negative feelings, or an unwillingness to go deeper into the history of the Nazi period or of the Holocaust. A trusting atmosphere is important in order that such issues may be openly addressed and discussed.

It is important to create an open learning environment where students are given space and time to reflect, where they are encouraged to ask questions, to discuss their thoughts and fears, to share ideas, opinions and concerns.

Learning should be student-centred. The teacher's role should be to facilitate rather than to lecture, and young people should be encouraged to play an active role in their own learning. History is not a body of knowledge to be transmitted from the mind of the teacher to the minds of the students, but should be a journey of discovery where young people formulate their own lines of enquiry; analyse a variety of sources of information; question different interpretations and representations of events; and find their own answers to challenging historical and moral questions.

## How to Teach about the Holocaust?

### **Individualise the history by translating statistics into personal stories**

Statistical studies are important and teachers should find methods to make the scale of the Holocaust and the numbers involved real to their students. But many young people will find it difficult to relate to the tragedy of the Holocaust if it is presented only in statistical terms.

Students should be given opportunities to see those persecuted by the Nazis not as a faceless mass of victims but as individuals. Use case studies, survivor testimony, letters and diaries from the time to show the human experience and to ensure that students understand that each 'statistic' was a real person, an individual with a life before the Holocaust, friends and family. Emphasise the dignity of the victims at all times.

An exploration of the Holocaust which fails to challenge stereotypical views that all perpetrators were mad or sadistic; that all rescuers were heroic, brave, good and kind; that all bystanders were apathetic risks dehumanising people in the past and rendering them as caricatures rather than real human beings.

By focusing on the stories of individuals, of moral dilemmas faced and choices made, teachers can make the history of the Holocaust more immediate and interesting to young people and more relevant to their lives today.

### **Use witness testimony to make this history more 'real' to your students**

Many countries still have Holocaust survivors living within their communities. If you are able to make contact with these survivors and invite them into your classroom you have the opportunity to provide your students with a special and powerful educational experience. Being in the presence of someone who experienced the unimaginable can create genuine empathy in the classroom. A number of organizations<sup>1</sup> can assist you in arranging for a survivor to speak at your school.

However, with an aging survivor population it may not be possible for your students to have this direct personal contact. In such cases, teachers should explore the use of video testimony to provide personal stories of the Holocaust. Other individuals who were directly involved in the Holocaust or who witnessed events at first hand also have powerful testimonies to give. If you are able to invite rescuers, liberators, and others into your classroom then their personal stories will also greatly enrich your students' understanding of the Holocaust.

If you decide to invite someone into your classroom to speak about their personal experiences, talk to that person before the session to ensure that they have the ability to speak to groups, and that they are clear about your educational objectives.

Do preparatory work with your class to ensure that your students are respectful and appreciative. Students should understand that although much time has elapsed since these events, the speaker will still find it painful to relate such intensely personal experiences.

Ensure that your students already have a secure grounding in the history of these events. The opportunity to meet witnesses should not be used primarily to transmit the historical events of the period - for the most part these people are not trained historians or teachers, nor might their experiences be 'typical' of the majority of people in the Holocaust. Instead, your students will have the rare privilege of meeting someone who witnessed and experienced these events first hand and to listen to their unique, personal testimony.

<sup>1</sup> A "Directory of Organizations" is available on the Task Force Website <http://taskforce.ushmm.org>



## How to Teach about the Holocaust?

Encourage your students to ask the survivor about what happened to them during the Holocaust but also about their life before and after, so that they get a sense of the whole person and of how they have tried to live with their experiences.

While it is not possible to generalise from one person's story, the effect of meeting a Holocaust survivor, rescuer or liberator can be to make these historical events more real to your students, reinforcing that this was a tragedy that befell ordinary people.

### ***A cross-curricular approach will enrich your students' understanding of the Holocaust***

The events of the Holocaust touch upon so many aspects of human behaviour that it is profoundly relevant to teachers across a range of subject disciplines. While a sound understanding of the history must be the foundation for study of the Holocaust, historians do not have a monopoly on this subject. Imaginative links between departments can enhance a scheme of work by drawing on different areas of expertise, approaching the Holocaust from multiple perspectives and building upon ideas and knowledge gained in other lessons.

The narratives of the Holocaust illustrate the extremes of human behaviour, of hatred and cruelty but also of courage and humanity. Learning about the Holocaust through history evokes powerful emotions, which poetry, art and music can help students to express creatively and imaginatively. The Holocaust raises important moral, theological and ethical questions that your students could explore in their religious studies, citizenship or civics lessons.

By co-ordinating an inter-disciplinary approach and drawing upon the expertise of colleagues in other subject areas you will share the teaching workload and enrich your students' understanding of the Holocaust.

### ***Contextualise the history***

The occurrence of the Holocaust must be studied in the context of European and global history as a whole to give students a perspective on the precedents and circumstances that contributed to it.

### ***Give broad and balanced coverage to this subject***

The Holocaust was not a uniform event but varied considerably from country to country and at different points in time. See the Task Force guidelines on 'What to teach' for further advice on events and themes to include in your scheme of work.

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## How to Teach about the Holocaust?

### ***Be precise in your use of language and urge your students to do the same***

There are many myths about the Holocaust, and your students may come to this subject with many preconceived ideas. Ambiguities in your use of language may help to perpetuate misconceptions.

Avoid using the language of the perpetrators, which mirror their views. Terms like 'Final Solution' may be quoted and critically analysed but should not be used to describe the historical event.

Definitions are important because they demand accuracy and clear thinking. One example is the use of the term 'camp'. While people died at many camps created by the Nazis and their collaborators, not all camps were intentionally built as killing centers. There were concentration camps, slave labor camps, and transit camps, to name a few. Different camps functioned in different ways at different times. It is essential that teachers be very precise when describing the activities that occurred at the various camps associated with this history and avoid generalizing about 'camps'.

### ***Distinguish between the history of the Holocaust and the lessons that might be learned from that history***

Be careful to distinguish between the history of the Holocaust and the moral lessons one can draw from a study of that history. There is a danger that the historical narrative is distorted if it is oversimplified or shaped to better serve the particular moral lesson that teachers wish their students to learn.

Learning about these events can sensitise young people to modern day examples of prejudice and injustice; the Holocaust can confront students with stereotypes, myths and misconceptions and enable them to test received prejudices against historical evidence. But moral lessons will not be well founded unless they are based upon an accurate and objective reading of the historical record.

Historical enquiry of the kind we should expect of our students will reveal to them the complexities of a world in which such choices were made and decisions taken. Students should be confronted with real dilemmas faced by people in the past. Only then might people's actions (and inaction) be seen within the context of their own time, and only then might we begin to draw meaningful lessons for today.

## How to Teach about the Holocaust?

### **Avoid simple answers to a complex history**

A desire to 'learn lessons' risks over-simplistic explanations of the Holocaust that neglect to take into account the historical context in which decisions were made. Such an approach can reduce students' understanding of complex events to straightforward lessons of right and wrong - 'the Holocaust happened because people failed to make the correct moral choices' - and lead to a superficial reading of history.

Students should investigate historical questions. This might include asking why the fate of Jews in different countries varied so markedly and could explore the different types of German occupation regimes from country to country. Such enquiries will invariably raise moral issues but students should be encouraged to view the past with humility. It is easy to condemn those who refused to hide or help their Jewish neighbours, but easy moral judgements of the 'bystanders' will not create a deeper understanding of the history or make our students 'better citizens'.

Given the complexity of this history, students should have opportunities to study the Holocaust in depth, including the dilemmas of the rescuers, who every day had to decide whether or not to continue to risk their lives and those of their families to help those in hiding; to investigate why the Allies didn't do more to save the Jews; why some of the Judenräte drew up lists of their fellow Jews for deportation to the death camps; why the majority of people in occupied lands did nothing to help their Jewish neighbours; why ordinary men and women willingly participated in mass murder.

This complex subject matter does not always yield simple answers and many times more questions arise than actual answers. Indeed, it is important for young people to realise that for some questions there are no answers.

### **Provide your students with access to primary sources**

It is in the letters, diaries, newspapers, and speeches, the works of art, orders and official documents of the time that the perpetrators, victims, rescuers and bystanders reveal themselves. Primary source material is essential for any meaningful exploration of the motivation, thoughts, feelings and actions of people in the past and for any serious attempt to understand the choices made and why events happened as they did.

Students should have opportunities to critically analyse original source material and to understand that analysis, interpretation and judgement must be based on a sound reading of the historical evidence.

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## How to Teach about the Holocaust?

### ***Students should be alerted to the fact that the perpetrators produced much of the evidence of the Holocaust***

Much of the evidence of the Holocaust - whether written documents, photographs or film - was produced by the Nazis so there is a danger of viewing the past only through the eyes of the perpetrators. If such material is not used carefully then we risk seeing the victims as the Nazis saw them, objectified, degraded, and dehumanised.

Such evidence needs to be contextualised and teachers must take into account the cognitive and emotional age of the child, ensuring that use of these images is appropriate, that students have been well prepared for the emotional impact they might have, and that young people are given space to reflect and to discuss their reactions afterward.

Care should be taken to balance these documents and photographs with the diaries, letters, photographs and other evidence from the victims themselves, in order that their voices are heard.

### ***Encourage your students to critically analyse different interpretations of the Holocaust***

Classroom learning is influenced by a broader cultural context and the Holocaust has entered the popular imagination through many and varied forms. Academic and popular histories, feature films, the mass media, documentaries, art, theatre, novels, memorials and museums all shape collective memory. Each interpretation is influenced by the circumstances in which it is produced, and may say as much about the time and place in which it was made as it does about the events it is portraying.

It is important that students consider how and why such representations of the past are produced, the selection of the evidence upon which they are based, and the intentions of those who have made them. Students should understand that although there are legitimate areas of historical debate, it does not follow that all interpretations are equally valid (see Avoid legitimising the denial of the past).

### ***Be responsive to the appropriateness of written and visual content and do not use horrific imagery to engage your students in a study of the Holocaust***

The explicit use of Holocaust images with the intent to shock and horrify is both degrading to the victims and insensitive to students. Respect for both the victims of the Holocaust and for your 'captive audience' in the classroom demands a sensitive approach and careful thought to what constitutes appropriate material. Teachers who have spent much time in building a relationship with their students risk a betrayal of trust by subjecting them to the most horrific and disturbing images. It is also this type of material that may cause the stress and embarrassment that can lead to nervous laughter and inappropriate remarks in the classroom.

The Holocaust can be taught effectively without using any photographs of piles of naked bodies, and the overuse of such imagery can be harmful. Engendering shock and revulsion is unlikely to constitute a worthwhile learning experience. It can, though, have a dehumanising effect and reinforce a view of 'Jews as victims'.

If teachers choose to use atrocity photographs, they should do so only where there is clear educational benefit to the students.

## How to Teach about the Holocaust?

### ***Avoid comparing the pain of any one group with that of another***

If the universal lessons of studying this period are truly to be understood - if we argue that through a study of the Holocaust young people might be sensitised to persecution, discrimination and hatred in the world today - then the experience of all victims of Nazi persecution, and the ideological background to that persecution, should be included in your scheme of work.

In the particularity of the Jewish experience we see the discrimination, economic exploitation, persecution and murder that resulted from Nazi antisemitism, but for examples of other forms of hatred and intolerance - that are equally relevant to modern society - we need to look elsewhere: to the Nazi persecution and murder of Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, Communists, political dissenters and social non-conformists.

The suffering of all victims of Nazi persecution needs to be addressed without relativising the Jewish experience. There can be no hierarchy of suffering, either within the history of the Nazi period or between the Holocaust and other genocides.

The experience of the 'other victims' of Nazi persecution should not be relegated to a single 'add on' lesson, with each of these distinct groups treated as if all were the same. Instead the story of these groups should be integrated within the narrative of the persecution of the Jewish people, e.g. the similarities and differences between the genocide of the Jews and that of the Roma and Sinti could be explored; the link between the personnel and methods of the Euthanasia programme and the death camps of Eastern Europe could be investigated.

Such an approach should not only acknowledge the persecution of 'other victims' but also should contribute to an understanding of the particularity of the Jewish experience, and help to place the Holocaust within the broader historical context. Just as it is not possible to explain the mass murder of the Jewish people without the context of the Second World War, so it is inadequate to study this story in isolation from the persecution of other victim groups.

### ***Allow your students to explore a variety of responses of the victims, including the many forms of resistance to the Nazis***

There were many forms of resistance to Nazi persecution, from armed struggle to finding ways of maintaining human dignity even in the most extreme circumstances of the ghettos and the camps. The victims of the Nazis did not always passively accept their persecution. It is important to study how the victims responded, the limits on their freedom of action and the many different forms of Jewish resistance to the Holocaust.

### ***Take care not to define the Jewish people solely in terms of the Holocaust***

Events of the Holocaust should be placed in historical context. There is a need to show life before and after the Holocaust, in order to make it clear that the Jewish people have a long history and rich cultural heritage, and to ensure that students do not think of Jews only as the dehumanised and degraded victims of Nazi persecution. Young people should be aware of the enormous loss to contemporary world culture that resulted from the destruction of rich and vibrant Jewish communities in Europe.

## How to Teach about the Holocaust?

### **Indicate that the Holocaust was not inevitable**

Just because a historical event took place, and it was documented in textbooks and on film, does not mean that it had to happen. The Holocaust took place because individuals, groups and nations made decisions to act or not to act. By focusing on those decisions you gain an insight into history and human nature and can better help your students to become critical thinkers.

### **Do not attempt to explain away the perpetrators as 'inhuman monsters'**

The Holocaust was a human event with human causes. There is a need to 'rehumanise' all the people in the Holocaust: to see victims, rescuers, collaborators, bystanders and perpetrators as ordinary human beings in extraordinary circumstances. This is not to normalise the perpetrators but to recognise that the majority were not sadistic psychopaths and that 'evil' will no longer do as sufficient explanation for the Holocaust.

The more difficult question is how was it humanly possible that ordinary men and women, loving fathers and husbands, could participate willingly in the murder of innocent men, women and children?

The motivation of the perpetrators needs to be studied in depth and students should use primary documents, case studies and individual biographies to weigh the relative importance of ideology, antisemitism, ambition, peer pressure, economic opportunism, criminal psychopathology, and other factors in explaining why people acted as they did.

### **Be careful to distinguish between the perpetrators of the past and present day societies in Europe and elsewhere**

Students should not form the opinion that all Germans were Nazis, nor that the German people were uniquely disposed to genocide. They should have opportunities to study the varied responses of the German people to Nazi policies including enthusiastic support, cooperation, discontent, apathy, and active resistance.

Be careful to distinguish between the Germany of the past and Germany in the present. The events of the Holocaust need to be located in their historical context so that the people, politics, society and culture of modern Germany is clearly distinguished from that of its Nazi past.

Students should also recognise that antisemitism is a worldwide and centuries-old phenomenon and there were many non-German perpetrators and willing collaborators across Europe. Other nationals served alongside SS units or as concentration camp guards; local police assisted in the round-ups and deportations of Jews to the death camps; at times local people instigated pogroms against their Jewish neighbours or betrayed Jewish people in hiding. Governments allied to Nazi Germany assisted in the programme murders on their own initiative.

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## How to Teach about the Holocaust?

### **Encourage your students to study local, regional, national, and global history and memory**

If you live in a country where the Holocaust has taken place, emphasise the specific events there in the context of the national history of that period, without disregarding the European dimension of the Holocaust. This investigation should include the experiences of victims, rescuers, perpetrators, collaborators, resisters and bystanders and should explore how far each of these has been incorporated into your local, regional or national memory and historical narratives.

If you live in a country that was one of the Allied powers or one that was neutral during the Second World War, encourage your students to re-examine your national narrative of this period. Why did countries not take more refugees in the 1930s and 1940s? Why did the Allies not make saving Jews one of their war aims? Could more have been done to save the Jews of Europe?

### **Ask your students to participate in and reflect upon national and local traditions of commemoration and remembrance**

Events such as Holocaust Memorial Days provide opportunities for intergenerational projects, encourage discussion among family members of related contemporary issues, and facilitate other forms of 'community learning'.

As well as enabling learning about the Holocaust to move from the classroom into the local community, such occasions can themselves become subject to investigation and learning. Students might be asked to consider how cultural influences shape memory and memorials; how their community chooses to reflect on its past, how different groups select from history and construct their own narratives; whether their nation addresses difficult aspects of its national history; and how such commemorations differ from those in other countries.

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## How to Teach about the Holocaust?

### **Select appropriate learning activities and avoid using simulations that encourage students to identify with perpetrators or victims**

While empathetic activities can be very effective techniques for interesting young people in history by highlighting human experience and responses to events in the past, great care needs to be taken in selecting such activities when approaching such a sensitive subject as the Holocaust.

It may be useful, for example, for students to take on the role of someone from a neutral country, responding to these events: a journalist writing an article for her newspaper about the persecution of the Jews; a concerned citizen writing to her political representative; or a campaigner trying to mobilise public opinion. Such activities can be good motivators to learning and also highlight possible courses of action that students may take over events that concern them in the world today.

Teachers need to be aware, however, that some young people might over-identify with the events of the Holocaust, be excited by the power and even the 'glamour' of the Nazis, or demonstrate a morbid fascination for the suffering of the victims. Here lies the danger of creative writing or role-play exercises that encourage students to imagine they were directly involved in the Holocaust. Using the creative expression of students in a cross-curricular approach can be worthwhile but teachers should be clear in their aims. Often 'empathetic exercises' are in poor taste and pedagogically flawed as it is impossible for us really to be able to imagine - except in the most superficial sense - what it would feel like to be in circumstances so far removed from our own life experience.

Such techniques also pale alongside the genuine empathy many students are able to experience on encountering personal stories, case studies and survivor testimony.

### **Avoid legitimising the denial of the past**

Holocaust denial is ideologically motivated. The deniers' strategy is to sow seeds of doubt through deliberate distortion and misrepresentation of the historical evidence. Teachers should be careful not to unwittingly legitimise the deniers through engaging in a false debate.

Care must be taken not to give a platform for deniers - do not treat the denial of the Holocaust as a legitimate historical argument, or seek to disprove the deniers' position through normal historical debate and rational argument.

However, many teachers feel that the phenomenon of Holocaust denial must be explored with their students, either because their young people raise the question themselves or because teachers are concerned that their students might come across these views later in life and be unprepared for the deniers' rhetorical techniques, and their ability to confuse or mislead.

If this is the case then Holocaust denial should be treated separately from the history of the Holocaust. It might be relevant to a separate unit on how forms of antisemitism have evolved over time, or as a media studies project exploring the manipulation, misrepresentation and distortion employed by groups for political, social or economic ends.

3



## How to Teach about the Holocaust?

### **Be aware of the potential and also the limitations of all instructional materials including the Internet**

Carefully evaluate the historical accuracy of all instructional materials. Antisemitism, homophobia and anti-Gypsy feeling are widespread in many societies and may be present in your classroom. Be aware that such prejudices might exist among your students and be careful when choosing instructional materials that through the reproduction of Nazi propaganda and atrocity photographs they do not unwittingly reinforce negative views of the victims. Ensure that your instructional materials include personal stories and case studies that challenge and subvert negative stereotypes of the victim groups.

In addition to printed materials the Internet is potentially a valuable educational and research tool. However, teachers do need to be careful in their use of the Internet, as there are a very large number of seemingly plausible sites that are written and maintained by Holocaust deniers and antisemites. Teachers should warn young people about this, making them aware that some search engines can produce unreliable results and helping students to identify legitimate and authoritative sites.

Teachers should emphasise the need to critically evaluate all sources of information and to consider the context in which it was produced. Encourage students to ask questions such as who wrote the information? What is the purpose of the website? Is there an agenda? If so, how does this affect the selection and presentation of information?

Recommend authoritative sites that you have vetted. The websites of the organizations listed in the Directory of Organizations (<http://taskforce.ushmm.org>) could be a useful starting point and each will have links to other reputable sites.

3

## How to Teach about the Holocaust?

### ***Distinguish between historical and contemporary events and avoid ahistorical comparisons***

For many educators a key motivation for teaching about the Holocaust is that it can sensitise young people to examples of injustice, persecution, racism, antisemitism and other forms of hatred in the world today. The Holocaust is often seen as a moral touchstone, a paradigm of evil. However, while learning such universal lessons can be an important part of studying the Holocaust, students should realise the differences between events, recognising the particular as well as the universal.

The term "holocaust" has become frequently used or misused by people to describe a whole range of horrible crimes or events. Unfortunately, due to its now common usage, this term has sometimes become trivialised or even corrupted. In many cases, the Nazi crimes and their victims are sidelined partly because of the limitations of language as well as because of a lack of understanding and clear information.

Learning about the Holocaust can lead young people to make useful comparisons with the modern world: human rights violations happened under the Nazis and the pre-war period in particular may well be comparable with modern examples of prejudice, discrimination and persecution.

Genocide, though, is clearly and fundamentally different and distinct from the loss of civil rights. Of course, there have been other examples of genocide and it is legitimate to ask, for example, what are the similarities and differences between the Holocaust and the genocide in Rwanda. But students should be clear that not all tragic events constitute genocide and should beware of making false comparisons.

Guard against superficial comparisons, or the impression that we can decide upon our course of action today by simple reference to past events. We live in complex times and do our students a disservice if they believe that the lessons from history are so clear that they offer easy solutions in the present.

3

## How to Teach about the Holocaust?

### *Be responsive to the concerns of your students*

Students who feel that the suffering of their own people or group has not been addressed may be resistant to learning about the persecution and murder of others. It is important to study other histories of racism, enslavement, persecution or colonialism that are particularly relevant to your student body.

Some teachers are concerned that teaching the Holocaust may enflame young people who falsely equate the suffering of Jewish people under Nazi persecution with Israeli policies in the Palestinian territories. But this is not a reason for avoiding teaching about the Holocaust.

While it may be hoped that learning about the Holocaust might sensitise your students to examples of injustice, persecution, prejudice and violations of human rights today, teachers should guard against a politicisation of history, and an appropriation of the Holocaust to further some campaigning agenda.

Teachers must be sensitive to the feelings and opinions of students on issues of real concern to them. They should be prepared to examine the causes of conflict in the modern world and young people should be given opportunities to discuss these issues openly. But care must be taken to clearly distinguish between different conflicts, and on the causes and nature of each.

Of course we want our young people to become active and engaged members of society. But using the example of the Holocaust to encourage such positive attitudes may be counter-productive and lead to feelings of helplessness if students are not given opportunities to discuss how they may respond to issues of interest to them. Build in time into your scheme of work to explore together with your students methods of legitimate and peaceful actions that are available to your students on issues of interest to them.

3

## Guidelines for Study Trips to Holocaust-Related Authentic and Non-Authentic Sites (Museums, Memorials, and Centers)

1. Visits to authentic and non-authentic sites create special learning experiences and opportunities different from those in the classroom. A visit can also raise the "status" of a subject in the eyes of students who see that they have been taken out of school and out of other subjects in order to make the visit.
2. Authentic sites provide a unique atmosphere, which can create a special desire to learn and which evokes strong emotions. It is the duty of the educator to be aware that they will be exposing their students to these strong emotions and to take this into account when structuring the visit.
3. Authentic sites provide opportunities for in-depth study of particular places and moments in time.
4. It is difficult for museums to reproduce the emotional impact that comes from a visit to an authentic site; however, students are less likely to be overwhelmed by the strength of their feelings and might be able to see the broader historical context.
5. The opportunity to study original artifacts can stimulate interest, motivation, and learning and can provide a direct and tangible link with people in the past that is difficult to replicate in the classroom.
6. The educator has a responsibility to the students and should be sure that a visit to an authentic site or museum is appropriate for the age of their students. It is essential that the educator consult with the staff of the authentic site or museum on this matter.
7. A visit to an authentic site or to a museum should not be considered in and of itself to be sufficient in a study of the Holocaust. The educator must be clear about the aims of a visit to an authentic site or museum. How will it complement, extend, and develop classroom work?
8. It is essential that the visit is carefully planned and that the educator contacts the site for advice when preparing the visit. Ideally, educators will make a preliminary visit and/or attend teacher-training seminars related to bringing students on a study trip to the site.
9. The educator must consider when a study trip occurs in the broader scheme of work for teaching the Holocaust, and how it is integrated with work in the classroom. The study trip requires preparation, the visit itself, and follow-up activities. These activities should have a clear emphasis on learning the history of the Holocaust, but might be enriched by an inter-disciplinary approach.
10. The site should recognize its responsibility to provide educators with advice, information, and materials for preparation and follow-up lessons in the classroom, and the educator should allocate sufficient time for these activities.
11. The preparation must make clear that an authentic site is a memorial with its own history, and that a visit to that site can involve learning not only about the past but also how that past has been remembered and commemorated.

## **Guidelines for Study Trips to Holocaust-Related Authentic and Non-Authentic Sites (Museums, Memorials, and Centers)**

**12.** A visit to an authentic site should focus on the history of that site. Students should actively use the site as historical evidence to explore themes and issues that were discussed during the pre-visit work. The visit should not be seen as only an opportunity to answer these historical questions, but as a stimulus for new historical, moral, and ethical questions.

**13.** Most students are unused to learning from museums and authentic sites and many will not have the learning skills necessary for these environments. Therefore, the museum and the authentic site should facilitate students' learning during the visit by helping students to interpret the displays. This should take into account students' ages, different learning needs, and varying degrees of knowledge. This might include the provision of orientation and/or debriefing sessions, guided tours, worksheets, audio guides, etc.

**14.** The educator should encourage discussion and reflection at the site as an integral part of the visit and the authentic site or museum should provide space and time to make this possible.

**15.** The follow-up work should respond to the questions raised by the students as a result of the study trip and help them to place what they have learned during the visit into a broader context.



**DECLARATION OF THE  
STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON THE HOLOCAUST  
JANUARY 2000**

The members of the Task Force are committed to the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, which reads as follows:

1. **The Holocaust (Shoah) fundamentally** challenged the foundations of civilization. The unprecedented character of the Holocaust will always hold universal meaning. After half a century, it remains an event close enough in time that survivors can still bear witness to the horrors that engulfed the Jewish people. The terrible suffering of the many millions of other victims of the Nazis has left an indelible scar across Europe as well.
2. **The magnitude of the Holocaust**, planned and carried out by the Nazis, must be forever seared in our collective memory. The selfless sacrifices of those who defied the Nazis, and sometimes gave their own lives to protect or rescue the Holocaust's victims, must also be inscribed in our hearts. The depths of that horror, and the heights of their heroism, can be touchstones in our understanding of the human capacity for evil and for good.
3. **With humanity still scarred** by genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, anti-semitism and xenophobia, the international community shares a solemn responsibility to fight those evils. Together we must uphold the terrible truth of the Holocaust against those who deny it. We must strengthen the moral commitment of our peoples, and the political commitment of our governments, to ensure that future generations can understand the causes of the Holocaust and reflect upon its consequences.
4. **We pledge to strengthen** our efforts to promote education, remembrance and research about the Holocaust, both in those of our countries that have already done much and those that choose to join this effort.
5. **We share a commitment** to encourage the study of the Holocaust in all its dimensions. We will promote education about the Holocaust in our schools and universities, in our communities and encourage it in other institutions.
6. **We share a commitment** to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and to honour those who stood against it. We will encourage appropriate forms of Holocaust remembrance, including an annual Day of Holocaust Remembrance, in our countries.
7. **We share a commitment** to throw light on the still obscured shadows of the Holocaust. We will take all necessary steps to facilitate the opening of archives in order to ensure that all documents bearing on the Holocaust are available to researchers.
8. **It is appropriate** that this, the first major international conference of the new millennium, declares its commitment to plant the seeds of a better future amidst the soil of a bitter past. We empathize with the victims' suffering and draw inspiration from their struggle. Our commitment must be to remember the victims who perished, respect the survivors still with us, and reaffirm humanity's common aspiration for mutual understanding and justice.

TASK FORCE FOR  
INTERNATIONAL  
COOPERATION ON  
**H**OLOCAUST  
EDUCATION  
REMEMBRANCE  
AND RESEARCH

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Guidelines