



# HOLOCAUST

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HUMANITY



## Guidelines for Teaching about the Holocaust

Educate. Inspire. Take Action.

### As determined by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM)

For a complete text of the guidelines with details please visit [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org).

Staff at the Holocaust Center for Humanity would be happy to answer questions, provide consultation, and assist in finding appropriate resources and lessons. [HolocaustCenterSeattle.org](http://HolocaustCenterSeattle.org); [info@HolocaustCenterSeattle.org](mailto:info@HolocaustCenterSeattle.org).

#### 1. Define the term “Holocaust.”

The Holocaust refers to a specific genocidal event in 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

#### 2. Do not teach or imply that the Holocaust was inevitable.

Just because a historical event took place, and it is 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. Focusing on those decisions leads to insights into history and human nature and can better help your students to become critical thinkers.

#### 3. Avoid simple answers to complex questions.

Allow students to think about the many factors and events that contributed to the Holocaust and often made decision-making difficult and uncertain.

#### 4. Strive for precision of language.

Any study of the Holocaust touches upon nuances of human behavior. Because of the complexity of the history, there is a temptation to generalize and, thus, to distort the facts (e.g., "all concentration camps were killing centers" or "all Germans were collaborators"). Rather, you must strive to help your students clarify the information presented and encourage them to distinguish, for example, the differences between prejudice and discrimination, collaborators and bystanders, armed and spiritual resistance, direct orders and assumed orders, concentration camps and killing centers, and guilt and responsibility. Try to avoid stereotypical descriptions.

#### 5. Strive for balance in establishing whose perspective informs your study of the Holocaust.

- a. There exist multiple perspectives including: victims, bystanders, perpetrators, children, adults, etc. Consider examining the actions, motives, and decisions of each group. Portray all individuals, including victims and perpetrators, as human beings who are capable of moral judgment and independent decision making.

- b. Students should be encouraged to consider why a particular text was written, who wrote it, who the intended audience was, whether there were any biases inherent in the information, whether any gaps occurred in discussion, whether omissions in certain passages were inadvertent or not, and how the information has been used to interpret various events.

**6. Avoid comparisons of pain.**

One cannot presume that the horror of an individual, family, or community destroyed by the Nazis was any greater than that experienced by victims of other genocides.

**7. Do not romanticize history.**

People who risked their lives to rescue victims of Nazi oppression provide useful, important, and compelling role models for students. However, given that only a small fraction of non-Jews under Nazi occupation (estimated at .005%) helped to rescue Jews, an overemphasis on heroic tales can result in an inaccurate and unbalanced account of history.

**8. Contextualize the history.**

- a. Study of the Holocaust should be viewed within a contemporaneous context, so students can begin to comprehend the circumstances that encouraged or discouraged particular actions or events. For example, when thinking about resistance, consider when and where an act took place; the immediate consequences to one's actions to self and family; the degree of control the Nazis had on a country or local population; the cultural attitudes of particular native populations historically toward different victim groups; and the availability and risk of potential hiding places.
- b. Encourage your students not to categorize groups of people only on the basis of their experiences during the Holocaust: contextualization is critical so that victims are not perceived only as victims.

**9. Translate statistics into people.**

Show that individual people's families of grandparents, parents, and children are behind the statistics and emphasize that within the larger historical narrative is a diversity of personal experience.

**10. Make responsible methodological choices.**

- a. Be sensitive to appropriate written and audiovisual content. Graphic materials should be used judiciously and only to the extent necessary to achieve the objective of the lesson.
- b. Avoid simulation activities and activities that attempt to re-create situations. Such activities oversimplify complex events and can leave students with a skewed view of history. Even worse, they are left with the impression at the conclusion of the activity that they now know what it was like during the Holocaust.