



WHY TEACH ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST?

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

www.ushmm.org/educators/teaching-about-the-holocaust (adapted)

THE HISTORY OF THE HOLOCAUST represents one of the most effective and most extensively documented subjects for a pedagogical examination of basic moral issues. A structured inquiry into Holocaust history yields critical lessons for an investigation of human behavior. A study of the Holocaust also addresses one of the central tenets of education in the United States—to examine what it means to be a responsible citizen.

Part of one's responsibility as a citizen in a democracy is to learn to identify the danger signals to a free society and to know how and when to react. A study of the Holocaust teaches the appropriate identification of these danger signs and the correct responses to these signals.

Because the objective of teaching any subject is to engage the intellectual curiosity of the student in order to inspire critical thought and personal growth, it is helpful to structure your lesson plan on the Holocaust by considering throughout questions of rationale. Before addressing what and how to teach, we would recommend that you contemplate the following:

- Why should students learn this history?
- What are the most significant lessons students can learn about the Holocaust?
- Why is a particular reading, image, document, or film an appropriate medium for conveying the lessons about the Holocaust that you wish to teach?
- What is the main point you want your students to take away from your lesson?
- What knowledge, skills, or values do you want your students to learn from your lesson?
- What will the students need to know prior to your lesson?
- What post-lesson activities will your students do in order to reflect on and reinforce what they have learned?

Among the various rationales offered by educators who have incorporated a study of the Holocaust into their various courses and disciplines are these:

- **a watershed event** The Holocaust was a watershed event, not only in the 20th century, but in the entire history of humanity.
- **ramifications of racism and prejudice** Study of the Holocaust assists students in developing understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping in any society. It helps students develop an awareness of the value of pluralism and encourages tolerance of diversity in a pluralistic society.
- **dangers of remaining silent** The Holocaust provides a context for exploring the dangers of remaining silent, apathetic, and indifferent in the face of others' oppression.
- **genocide in modern nations** Holocaust history demonstrates how a modern nation can utilize its technological expertise and bureaucratic infrastructure to implement destructive policies ranging from social engineering to genocide.
- **responsibilities when confronted with genocide** A study of the Holocaust helps students think about the use and abuse of power, and the role and responsibilities of individuals, organizations, and nations when confronted with civil rights violations and/or policies of genocide.
- **how history happens** As students gain insight into the many historical, social, religious, political, and economic factors which cumulatively resulted in the Holocaust, they gain a perspective on how history happens, and how a convergence of factors can contribute to the disintegration of civilized values. Part of one's responsibility as a citizen in a democracy is to learn to identify the danger signals, and to know when to react.
- **disintegration of civilized values**
- **the danger signals & when to react**

Most students demonstrate a high level of interest in studying the Holocaust precisely because the subject raises questions of fairness, justice, individual identity, peer pressure, conformity, indifference, and obedience—issues that adolescents confront in their daily lives. Students are also struck by the magnitude of the Holocaust, and by the fact that so many people acting as collaborators, perpetrators, and bystanders allowed this genocide to occur by failing to protest or resist.