

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
**TEACHING AND
LEARNING**
ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST



INTERNATIONAL
**HOLOCAUST
REMEMBRANCE**
ALLIANCE

Cover image: Participants at Salzburg Global Seminar's Holocaust Education and Genocide Prevention Session discuss IHRA teaching guidelines in 2015. Credit: Salzburg Global Seminar.

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ABOUT THE IHRA

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) unites governments and experts to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education, research and remembrance and to uphold the commitments of the 2000 Stockholm Declaration.

The IHRA (formerly the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, or ITF) was initiated in 1998 by former Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson. Today the IHRA network consists of over 40 countries as well as key international partner organizations with a mandate to deal with Holocaust-related issues.

The IHRA's network of experts includes representatives from the world's foremost institutions which specialize in education, remembrance and research about the Holocaust. From 2019 to 2023, IHRA's experts and political representatives are focusing their efforts on safeguarding the historical record and countering distortion.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This publication draws on earlier guidelines for educators and educational policymakers created by IHRA's experts and would not have been possible without the many contributions offered by the delegates throughout the IHRA representing all delegations. Special gratitude to the following experts: Jennifer Ciardelli (USA), Niels Weitkamp (Netherlands), Andrea Szőnyi (Hungary), Benjamin Geissert (Norway), Wolf Kaiser (Germany), Paula Cowan (UK), Lena Casiez (France), and Yessica San Roman (Spain).



PREFACE



Dr. Kathrin Meyer
IHRA Executive Secretary

“It happened once. It should not have happened, but it did. It must not happen again, but it could. That is why education about the Holocaust is fundamental.”

It was with these powerful words that Göran Persson opened The Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust back in 2000. Over the three days of the Forum, education was highlighted in the messages of Heads of State, educators, historians and survivors. It seemed clear to all those gathered in Stockholm, half a century after the end of the Holocaust, that the international community shared a responsibility to support the next generation in reflecting on the history of the Holocaust and its consequences. Education was and remains the cornerstone of IHRA’s work to ensure that the memory of the Holocaust is never forgotten.

When I look around at the over 300 delegates who form the IHRA network, I am inspired by the passion and depth of knowledge that each of our delegates brings to the table. But something I have learned throughout my career is that passion and knowledge alone are not enough. Excellent civil society initiatives are not enough. We also need the political commitment of governments, whose responsibility it is to ensure the broad education of their societies. Teachers and educators count on this political support to strengthen and encourage the excellent work that is being done.

Throughout our member countries, a variety of institutions – including our international partner organizations – are working tirelessly to teach students, and train and empower teachers and educators. Thanks to these institutions, a variety of high-quality educational resources exists in our member countries and beyond. And thanks to our delegates, I am pleased to present these *IHRA Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust* to complement and take their place amongst these resources. I am delighted that this volume is published in partnership with UNESCO and I hope that other organizations will support our dissemination efforts. These Recommendations mark a great achievement on behalf of all our experts and I thank each and every one of them for their expertise and thoughtful input.

The Stockholm Declaration states “We will promote education about the Holocaust in our schools and universities, in our communities and encourage it in other institutions.” These *Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust* bring us one step closer to honoring this commitment.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and murder of Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. A continent-wide genocide, it destroyed not only individuals and families but also communities and cultures that had developed over centuries. The Holocaust occurred in the context of Nazi-led persecution and murder that targeted many additional groups. Sessions and activities should always help learners to advance their knowledge about this unprecedented destruction and preserve the memory of persecuted and murdered individuals and groups. Educators and learners should be encouraged and empowered to reflect upon the moral, political and social questions raised by the Holocaust and their relevance today.

Benefiting from the expertise of delegates from more than 30 member countries, the IHRA Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust are intended to provide a basis for policymakers, practitioners, and educators that will help them:

1. Develop knowledge of the Holocaust, ensuring accuracy in individual understanding and knowledge and raising awareness about the possible consequences of antisemitism;
2. Create engaging teaching environments for learning about the Holocaust;
3. Promote critical and reflective thinking about the Holocaust including the ability to counter Holocaust denial and distortion;
4. Contribute to Human Rights and genocide prevention education.

WHY TEACH ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST?

In addition to equipping learners with knowledge about an event that fundamentally challenged human values, teaching and learning about the Holocaust gives learners the opportunity to understand some of the mechanisms and processes that lead to genocide and the choices people made to accelerate, accept or resist the process of persecution and murder, acknowledging that these choices were sometimes made under extreme circumstances.

The “Why teach about the Holocaust” section articulates a number of these deeper understandings. Educational stakeholders can use these to frame the study of this past event with consideration about how it shapes the present. Teaching and learning about the Holocaust provides an essential opportunity to inspire critical thinking, societal awareness, and personal growth.



WHAT TO TEACH ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST?

The Recommendations aim to deepen the understanding of the Holocaust by asking crucial questions concerning the historical context of the Holocaust, its scope and scale and why and how it happened. The section presents a series of critical questions that educators can use to frame their examination of the Holocaust. Four essential questions are suggested:

- What were the historical conditions and key stages in the process of this genocide?
- Why and how did people participate or become complicit in these crimes?
- How did Jews respond to persecution and mass murder?
- Why and how did some people resist these crimes?

More detailed questions are offered to help learners explore how and why the Holocaust happened through a variety of perspectives. Questions prompt examination of conditions and behaviors before, during, and after the Second World War. They encourage study of the relations between the Holocaust and other mass atrocities committed by the Nazis and their collaborators, such as the genocide against the Roma and Sinti. They encourage educators to explore who was responsible and complicit and what motivated the behavior of perpetrators, collaborators, bystanders, and rescuers. They emphasize the great variety of responses by the victims. They also suggest discussing the relevance of the history of the Holocaust for contemporary questions such as the policy towards refugees, the consequences of human rights violations not only for the concerned individuals, but for societies as a whole, and the efforts for genocide prevention.

HOW TO TEACH ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST?

Above all, educators should be confident that the Holocaust can be taught effectively and successfully with careful preparation and appropriate materials. The section “How to teach about the Holocaust” discusses possibilities and challenges for teaching and learning about the Holocaust by presenting practical approaches and methods to apply in both formal and informal educational settings. The importance of accuracy and precision with regard to historical facts, historical comparisons, and use of language is emphasized. The section encourages the use of learner-centered approaches that support critical thinking and reflection. Attention is paid to the importance of carefully selecting primary and secondary sources appropriate for the learners which make clear the individuality and agency of historical actors. The section also discusses the importance of including a nuanced historical context and avoiding ahistorical comparisons when exploring the Holocaust in the context of other fields such as genocide prevention and human rights.

INTRODUCTION

“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.”

– Article 5 of the Stockholm Declaration, 2000.

RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION

The Holocaust was a watershed event in world history, spanning geographic boundaries and affecting all segments of the societies it touched. Decades later, societies continue to wrestle with the memory and historical record of the Holocaust in ways that intersect with our contemporary realities. Teaching and learning about the Holocaust is an essential opportunity to inspire critical thinking, societal awareness, and personal growth. Yet this massive topic can also pose challenges to educators due to its traumatic nature, broad expanse, and intersection with challenging human dynamics including racism and antisemitism.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) brings together governments and experts from more than 30 member countries to [strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education, remembrance and research worldwide](#). The IHRA is in a unique position to offer comprehensive recommendations on teaching and learning about the Holocaust based on the expertise of its international delegates. The scope of teaching and learning about the Holocaust has expanded in terms of professionalization, institutionalization, and globalization. IHRA members bring new historical discoveries and increased engagement with Holocaust education, remembrance and research.

Even so, the IHRA's review of empirical research into [Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust](#) revealed a number of concerns. Significant gaps in knowledge and understanding about the Holocaust, widespread myths and misconceptions and a tendency to avoid difficult questions about national histories were all identified as challenges to teaching and learning about the Holocaust. Additionally, nations have different histories and legitimate narratives about the Holocaust, as well as different educational settings, pedagogies and traditions that must be taken into consideration.

Based on the shared experiences and views of experts, as well as on feedback from educators from IHRA member countries, the following updated Recommendations provide policymakers, practitioners, and educators with a framework for teaching and learning about the Holocaust. These Recommendations are not intended as immediate targets to be implemented and achieved wholesale, but rather as framing and approaches that practitioners, educators, and policymakers can work from together.

AIMS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

An update to the IHRA's original guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust, these refreshed Recommendations contribute to an ongoing conversation between academics, policymakers, practitioners and wider society about the relevance and importance of teaching and learning about the Holocaust today. The Recommendations are intended to provide a basis for policy makers, practitioners, and educators that will help them:

1. Develop their knowledge of the Holocaust, ensuring accuracy in individual understanding and knowledge and raising awareness about the possible consequences of [antisemitism](#);
2. Create engaging teaching environments for learning about the Holocaust;
3. Promote critical and reflective thinking about the Holocaust including the ability to counter [Holocaust denial and distortion](#);
4. Contribute to Human Rights and genocide prevention education.

DEFINING THE HOLOCAUST

As identified in Section 3.1, meaningful education about the Holocaust requires consistent and accurate use of terms. The terms “Holocaust” and “Shoah” refer to a specific genocidal event in twentieth-century history: the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and murder of Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. The height of the persecution and murders occurred during the context of the Second World War. This genocide occurred in the context of Nazi-led persecution and murder that targeted additional groups as well, including the genocide of the Roma and Sinti.

Teaching and learning about the Holocaust takes the discrimination, persecution, murder, and genocide of the Jews by the National Socialist regime and its collaborators as its focus, and considers the understanding of Nazi crimes against non-Jewish victims essential to understanding the Holocaust. Since the reach of Nazi aggression and persecution extended beyond continental Europe to North Africa, teaching about the Holocaust can also include an understanding of the treatment of North African Jewry.



In general the following recommendations also apply to teaching and learning about the genocide of the Roma and Sinti even as this study requires specific knowledge about the minority's history and the basics of antigypsyism as well as the Nazi persecution and annihilation policy (a policy rooted in racial ideology). It is important to understand that an attitude of prejudice and resentment towards the Sinti and Roma is deeply rooted in European history and that the genocide of Sinti and Roma was neglected and denied after the war, only officially being recognized in 1982. The IHRA Committee on the Genocide of the Roma aims to raise awareness about the genocide of the Roma under National Socialism and increase the commitment of the IHRA to inform, educate, research and remember the genocide of the Roma ([see additional resources](#)).

TEACHING

In general, teaching and learning about the Holocaust should:

- **Advance knowledge** about this unprecedented destruction;
- **Preserve the memory** of those individuals and specific groups who were persecuted and murdered;
- **Encourage reflection** by educators and learners on the moral, political and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust and their relevance today.

OUTLINE

Recommendations are divided into the following sections:

1. **Justification and Rationale:** [Why teach about the Holocaust?](#)
2. **Content:** [What to teach about the Holocaust?](#)
3. **Pedagogy:** [How to teach about the Holocaust?](#)
4. **Additional Resources:** [Further information from other organizations](#) that provide materials for teaching and learning about the Holocaust and [a list of key terms](#).

WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM THESE RECOMMENDATIONS?

The Recommendations are meant to support educational policymakers, school leadership, educators, and other educational stakeholders in both formal and informal educational settings. While professionals play different roles in their educational environments, all can benefit from thinking critically about “why, what, and how” to teach about the Holocaust.

Educators are advised to read Sections 1 and 2 before planning the content of their

lesson(s), and to read Section 3 as they decide on their teaching approach(es). Educators may also find it useful to use Section 3 as a tool to support their reflection on and evaluation of their teaching after they have delivered their lesson(s). By doing so, the following Recommendations will be of use to both experienced Holocaust educators and educators who are new to teaching and learning about the Holocaust. The diagram below represents a model process.

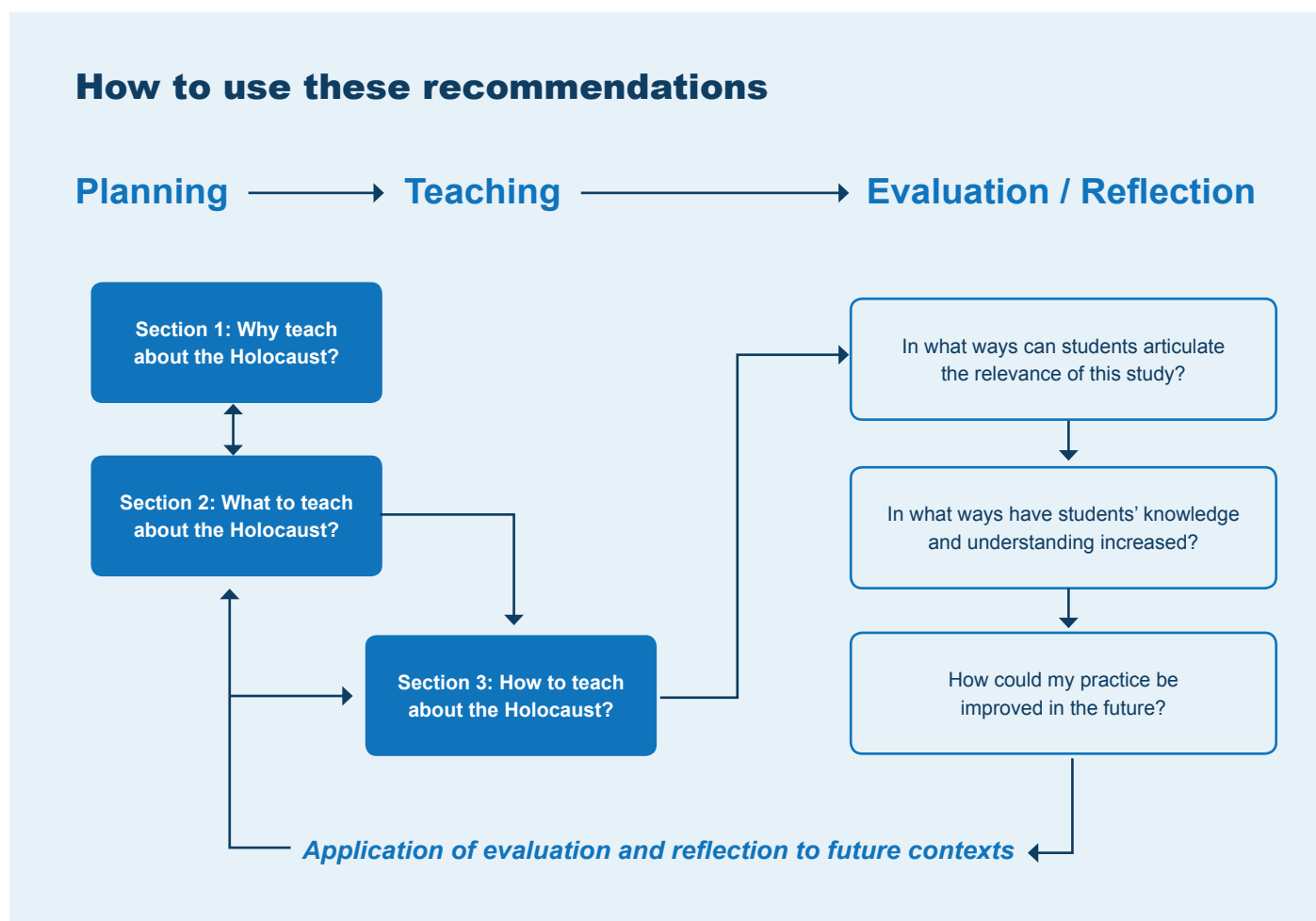


Figure 1. How to use these recommendations



1

WHY TEACH

ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST?

Considering how best to make any examination of the Holocaust meaningful and relevant for learners in their national contexts is essential. This section is meant to help policymakers, school leadership, educators, and other educational stakeholders formulate rationales for teaching and learning about the Holocaust by sharing a variety of objectives that examining the Holocaust can address. This is of special importance for the IHRA member countries who have committed to teaching and learning about the Holocaust in their countries.

Teaching and learning about the Holocaust provides an essential opportunity to inspire critical thinking, societal awareness, and personal growth. The Holocaust, a watershed event in world history, spanned geographic boundaries, affected all segments of societies, and occurred in the context of the Second World War. Decades later, societies continue to wrestle with both the memory and historical record of the Holocaust in the midst of contemporary challenges. These include persistent antisemitism and xenophobia, unfolding genocides in the world, the ongoing refugee crisis, and threats to many democratic norms and values. This is particularly relevant with the rise of authoritarian-style governments as well as by populist or extreme movements within (liberal) democracies.

Educators in formal settings (such as schools) and informal settings (such as museums and other such entities) can engage learners through responsible, fact-based historical approaches informed by other disciplines. Although unique in time and place, the Holocaust was nonetheless a human event that raises challenging questions: about individual and collective responsibility, the meaning of active citizenship, and about the structures and societal norms that can become dangerous for certain groups and society as a whole.





KEY ARGUMENTS FOR TEACHING ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

- The Holocaust was an **unprecedented attempt to murder all European Jews** and thus to extinguish their culture; it fundamentally challenged the foundations of human values.
- Study of the Holocaust **underlines that genocide is a process which can be challenged or perhaps stopped rather than a spontaneous or inevitable event**. The Holocaust demonstrated how a nation can utilize its bureaucratic structures, processes and technical expertise while enlisting multiple segments of society to implement policies over time ranging from exclusion and discrimination to genocide.
- Examination of the history of the Holocaust **can illustrate the roles of historical, social, religious, political, and economic factors in the erosion and disintegration of democratic values and human rights**. This study can prompt learners to develop an understanding of the mechanisms and processes that lead to genocide, in turn leading to reflection on the importance of the rule of law and democratic institutions. This can enable learners to identify circumstances that can threaten or erode these structures, and reflect on their own role and responsibility in safeguarding these principles in order to prevent human rights violations that are liable to explode into mass atrocities.
- Teaching and learning about the Holocaust is **an opportunity to unpack and analyze the decisions and actions taken (or not taken) by a range of people in an emerging time of crisis**. This should be a reminder that decisions have consequences, regardless of the complexity of the situations in which they are taken. The Holocaust involved a range of individuals, institutions, organizations, and government agencies at the local, national, regional and global levels. Analyzing and understanding actions taken or not taken at different levels during the Holocaust raises complicated questions about how individuals and groups responded to the events of the Holocaust. Whether the focus is on the political calculations of nations or the daily concerns of individuals (including fear, peer pressure, greed or indifference, for example), it is clear that dynamics that felt familiar and ordinary led to extraordinary outcomes.

- Teaching and learning about the Holocaust **may equip learners to more critically interpret and evaluate cultural manifestations and representations of this event and thereby minimize the risk of manipulation.** In many countries, the Holocaust has become a theme or motif commonly reflected in both popular culture and in political discourse, often through media representation. Teaching and learning about the Holocaust can help learners to identify distortion and inaccuracy when the Holocaust is used as a rhetorical device in the service of social, political and moral agendas.
- **Studying antisemitism in the context of Nazi ideology illuminates the manifestations and ramifications of prejudice, stereotyping, xenophobia, and racism.** Antisemitism persists in the aftermath of the Holocaust and evidence demonstrates it is on the rise. Teaching and learning about the Holocaust creates a forum for examining the history and evolution of antisemitism – an essential factor that made the Holocaust possible. Examination of different tools used to promote antisemitism and hatred, including dangerous speech, propaganda, manipulation of the media, and group-targeted violence, can help learners to understand the mechanisms employed to divide communities.
- Teaching and learning about the Holocaust **can also support learners in commemorating Holocaust victims, which has in many countries become part of cultural practice.** As part of their school curriculum learners are often invited to participate in international and local memorial days and commemoration events. Commemoration cannot replace learning, but study of the Holocaust is essential to help learners build the necessary knowledge and understanding for meaningful present-day commemorations and to continue this cultural practice in the future. Similarly, commemoration can help participants to engage with the emotional labor that forms a part of studying sensitive or traumatic history, creating space for philosophical, religious or political reflection that the academic curriculum may struggle to accommodate.



2

WHAT TO TEACH

ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST?

Teaching and learning about the Holocaust will vary depending on national and local contexts. These contexts will inform decisions regarding which questions are explored more deeply and which are addressed more concisely.

The time allocated for teaching about the Holocaust must, however, be sufficient for learners to be able to answer the following questions in significant rather than superficial ways:

- What were the historical conditions and key stages in the process of this genocide?
- Why and how did people participate or become complicit in these crimes?
- How did Jews respond to persecution and mass murder?
- Why and how did some people resist these crimes?

The issues and questions raised in this section are not intended to be exhaustive, but rather a set of core learning goals and content. Bear in mind that concerns about the Holocaust will change over time; questions that do not seem relevant today may become very important in the future. With these important caveats in mind, educators are encouraged to enable learners to explore the issues and questions which follow.



What to teach: core historical content

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and murder of Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. A continent-wide genocide, it destroyed not only individuals and families but also communities and cultures that had developed over centuries.

What were the key stages, turning points and decisions in the process of genocide?

How and why did people perpetrate/participate/become complicit in these crimes?

How did Jews respond to persecution and mass murder?

<i>Precursors</i>	<i>The rise of the Nazis</i>	<i>The Second World War</i>	<i>Post-war: Immediate Aftermath</i>
– European anti-Judaism – The development of antisemitism and racism – The impact of the First World War	– Jews in Nazi ideology and propaganda – The response of German society to the Nazis, before and following the seizure of power – World response to Nazi rule and policy	– The impact of war on the persecution of the Jews – Resistance and rescue – The Einsatzgruppen killing operations – The timing of the decision to exterminate European Jewry – The role of the camps in the “Final Solution” – The impact of the end of the Second World War	– Situation of survivors after liberation – Transitional justice

Figure 2. What to teach: core historical content

2.1 SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE HOLOCAUST

Learners should know and understand that the Holocaust was a continent-wide genocide that destroyed not only individuals and families but entire communities and cultures that had developed in Europe over centuries.

2.2 WHY AND HOW DID IT HAPPEN

Learners should be given opportunities to explore why and how the Holocaust happened, including:

- What were the key stages, turning points and decisions in the process of genocide?
- How and why did people participate/ perpetrate/ become complicit in these crimes?
- How did Jews respond to persecution and mass murder?

2.3 CONTEXTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

In order to understand how the Holocaust was possible, one needs to consider it from a number of perspectives and in the context of a variety of processes, taking the following questions as a starting-point. Incorporating connections to and examination of the national and local contexts is essential throughout.

2.3.1 Precursors to the Holocaust

- What was European anti-Judaism and how was it related to Christian teachings?
- How did antisemitism and racial thinking develop in the nineteenth century and how was it related to nationalist ideologies?
- What was the impact of the First World War and political developments in Europe in the interwar period on Jewish/Non-Jewish Relations?

2.3.2 The rise of the Nazis, their worldview, their racial ideology and political practice

- How and why did the Nazis target Jews and others in their propaganda and politics?
- How did the establishment of the National Socialist dictatorship, in particular the abolition of fundamental rights and the perversion of the rule of law, pave the way to the Holocaust and how did German society respond to this process?
- How did the Nazis particularly target the rights and property of Jews in the prewar period?
- How did the world respond to Nazi rule and policies?

2.3.3 The course and development of the Holocaust in the context of the Second World War

- How did the Nazis radicalize the persecution of Jews after Nazi Germany had started the Second World War, and how was this influenced by the course of the war?
- How and why did the Nazis organize the expropriation of Jews and how did this impact their chances to survive?
- What were the different types of ghettos and how were they used to segregate, concentrate and persecute communities?
- How were the mobile killing squads (Einsatzgruppen) able to murder hundreds of thousands of Jews within half a year after the German invasion of the Soviet Union?
- At what stage did the Nazis take the decision to attempt the murder of all European Jews?
- [How did the mass murder of people with disabilities pave the way for the systematic killing of Jews?](#)
- How did the Nazis use death camps and other camps to realize the intended “Final Solution of the European Jewish question”?
- What was the influence of collaboration or resistance in countries allied with Germany and in the occupied countries on the persecution?
- What role did the defeat of Nazi Germany and its allies play in bringing the Holocaust to an end?

2.3.4 Post-War: Immediate aftermath

- What challenges were faced by survivors of the Holocaust after liberation? How did the situation of surviving Jews after liberation differ from the situation of non-Jewish victims of persecution and warfare?
- What elements of transitional justice were provided after the end of the Nazi regime and the war in Europe? In what way were they successful? What was not achieved?

2.4 CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Learners should be able to differentiate between different mass atrocities committed by the Nazis and their collaborators, each with their own causes and outcomes.

Questions to consider might include:

- Which groups became victims of Nazi persecution and mass murder, out of which motivations, and with what outcomes?
- How does the genocide of the Jews relate to the other atrocities committed by the Nazis and their collaborators including the genocide against the Roma and Sinti?

2.4.1 Responsibility

If learners are to begin to understand how the Holocaust was possible, and to consider what questions this raises for societies today, then they need to recognize that it is not sufficient to limit responsibility for these crimes to Hitler and the Nazis.

Questions to consider might include:

- Who was responsible and complicit and what were their motivations? What are the differences between responsibility and complicity?
- Men were overwhelmingly involved in the killing actions, but what supporting roles did women play, and what responsibility did women also bear for these crimes?
- What were the roles of local non-Jewish and Jewish populations (including rescue and collaboration)?
- What attitudes did the majority of the population in occupied countries adopt toward the persecution and murder of the Jews?

- Who were the individuals and groups who took the risk to help and rescue Jews? What motivated them? What prevented or discouraged others from taking similar action?
- What was known about the persecution and murder of the Jews and when?
- How did the world respond to information about the persecution and murder of the Jews?
- What was known about the genocide of the Roma and why did it not receive attention outside the Nazi-dominated region?
- What did the Allies, neutral countries, the Churches and others do to rescue victims of Nazi crimes, and could they have done more?

2.4.2 Agency of the victims

It is essential that the Holocaust is not seen only from the perspective of the perpetrators' sources, actions or narratives. Jews and additional targeted victims must appear on the historical stage as individuals and communities with their own contexts and histories rather than as passive objects to be murdered en masse. As such, educators need to ensure that learners recognize that the victims had agency, and responded to the unfolding crimes as best they could, in light of their previous understanding of the world and their place in it, and the information available at the time. This might include an examination of:

Pre-war life

- How did Jews live in their home countries and how were their lives affected by the persecution initiated by the Nazis, their allies and collaborators?

Responses and resistance

- How did the Nazis isolate Jews from the rest of their societies? How did Jews respond to this isolation?
- What characterized Jewish leadership, education, community, religious practice and culture during the Holocaust?
- To what degree and in what ways could Jews offer resistance? To what extent did they do so? What constrained or empowered them in these decisions and actions?
- How were men, women and children affected differently by Nazi persecution and how did they respond?

2.4.3 Relevance of the Holocaust for contemporary questions

Learners should be given the opportunity to discuss the relevance of the historical experience of the Holocaust for today. Questions to be addressed may include:

- How can the study of the persecution of the victims of Nazi ideology advance the understanding of the impact of human rights violations on societies today? In particular, what can it tell us about the relationships between stereotypes, prejudices, scapegoating, discrimination, persecution, and genocide?
- How can knowledge about Jewish refugees before, during and after the Holocaust be relevant for understanding contemporary refugee crises?
- What can learning about the Holocaust tell us about the process of genocide, its warning signs, and possibilities for intervention that might strengthen contemporary efforts at genocide prevention?
- Are there contexts where the use of Holocaust imagery and discourse are unhelpful or actively problematic? Are there representations of the Holocaust which are particularly problematic?





3

HOW TO TEACH

ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST?

No single “correct” way of teaching, no ideal methodology appropriate for all educators and their learners exists for any subject. The recommendations offered here are, however, based on practical experiences and intended to be useful to schoolteachers and other educators in constructing their own schemes of work, taking into account the learning needs of individuals.





3.1 OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

3.1.1 The Holocaust can be successfully taught; do not be afraid to approach this subject

Some educators are hesitant to explore the history of the Holocaust because of the perceived difficulties and sensitivities in teaching the subject. Some educators wonder how to convey the scale of the tragedy, the enormity of the numbers involved, and the depths to which humanity can sink. Some wonder how to engage their learners without traumatizing them or worry about possible reactions to the subject. In particular, educators want to be prepared for a range of behaviors and responses that can be prompted by the intensity of the content.

Learners of different ages can be introduced to the history of the Holocaust when method and content is age-appropriate. Keeping the focus on individual stories concerning victims, escape, and rescue can be appropriate for younger audiences. Older learners can be asked to engage with more complex and challenging material with greater use of appropriate primary sources. The selection of sources and textbooks should be undertaken with reference to these recommendations, as well as with sensitivity to the emotional needs and particular circumstances of the learners.

Overall, do not be afraid to approach this subject. While it may appear daunting, experience has shown that the Holocaust can be taught to learners successfully and with positive results. Investigate and use the wide range of material describing methods, best practice and specific teaching strategies which can be used to assist in the planning, design and delivery of sessions.

3.1.2 Be precise in use of language and define the term Holocaust

- Precision with language when describing terms and activities can help learners avoid generalizations that blur distinctions and understandings. For example, the term “camp” is used to describe a wide range of sites and locations. Although people died and were murdered at many camps created by the Nazis and their collaborators, not all camps were intentionally built as killing centers or death camps. Different camps functioned in different ways at different times and included concentration camps, slave labor camps, and transit camps, to name a few. Precise definitions help avoid misunderstandings by providing specificity.

- Using a clear definition for the term “Holocaust” (or “Shoah”) can minimize confusions from the start. The IHRA uses the term “Holocaust” to describe the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and murder of Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. The height of the persecution and murders occurred during the context of the Second World War. Some organizations - even some authoritative institutions - apply the term “Holocaust” in a very broad sense to encompass all victims of Nazi persecution. Yet most historians of the period use a more precise definition which recognizes that Jews were targeted for systematic persecution and murder in a manner which sets their fate apart from others, with the possible exception of Sinti and Roma (victim groups for whom infants to elderly were also targeted for annihilation). Be aware of the different ways in which various source materials may understand and employ the term. Ensure use of terms is consistent and accurate.
- Share that for many people the term “Holocaust” is problematic. A composite of two Greek words, “Holocaust” suggests the offering of a sacrifice by burning. The term can mistakenly imply that the mass murder of the Jews was a form of martyrdom rather than the result of genocide. For this reason, many prefer to use the Hebrew word “Shoah” which means “catastrophe.”
- Provide learners the opportunity to critically discuss terminology. Make explicit, for example, that terms such as “Final Solution” or “Jewish Problem” were euphemisms created and used by the perpetrators in the historical moment to articulate their worldview as opposed to existing as neutral language to impartially describe past events. Similarly, terms such as “ghetto” should be deconstructed to reveal the distinct meanings employed by the Nazis versus pre- and post-Nazi applications.
- Educators are encouraged to consider the ways in which society and culture speak about the Holocaust as these societal notions can influence learners’ understandings. Popular culture and discourse may perpetuate myths and misconceptions about the history. Modeling consistency, accuracy, and precision of language can help to unpack preconceived notions.

3.1.3 Give broad coverage to this subject and contextualize the history

The Holocaust was a series of linked events that occurred across national boundaries over time in the context of war. Thus, the events continue to be a part of many different European and global histories and historical processes. Learners should be able to identify that the Holocaust was carried out in different ways from country to country. Additionally, various short, medium, and long-term factors in European and global history made genocide possible. Create opportunities to unpack these by considering broader contexts within which the events of the Holocaust occurred.

These dimensions have been researched extensively by scholars. Try and make use of authoritative and recent academic studies that encompass different aspects of the genocide and its evolution when designing schemes of work and planning individual sessions.

3.2 LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND COMPREHENSIVE APPROACHES

3.2.1 Create a positive learning environment, with an active pedagogy and a learner-centered approach

Try to create an open and safe learning environment where learners are given space and time to reflect, where they are encouraged to ask questions, to discuss their thoughts and fears, and to share ideas, opinions, and concerns.

The Holocaust challenges many assumptions that young people may have about the nature of society, progress, civilization, and human behavior. Learners may have defensive reactions, negative feelings, or an unwillingness to go deeper into the history of the Nazi period or the Holocaust. In addition, alternative views and attitudes can be part of their reactions. A positive and trusting learning environment is important in order that such issues may be openly addressed and discussed.

Learners build understanding of the world predominantly through their own discovery and communication with others, and not simply by transmission of knowledge from educator to learner. Adopt a learner-centered approach in which the educator's role is to facilitate discovery rather than solely imparting knowledge and encourage learners to take an active role in their own learning.

3.2.2 Be responsive to the background, emotions and concerns of the learners

Classrooms are rarely homogeneous, whether in terms of religious, cultural, social or ethnic origin. Individual learners bring their own backgrounds, preconceptions, personal emotions, and concerns. Additionally, public debate and current political issues will affect how learners approach the topic. The diverse nature of each classroom and ongoing public debates offer multiple possibilities to make the Holocaust relevant for learners and engage them in the topic.

Be sensitive to the feelings and opinions of learners, especially on issues of real concern to them. Create opportunities to discuss these issues openly. Be prepared to examine other histories of genocide, racism, enslavement, persecution, or colonialism in the modern world. Take care to clearly distinguish between different cases including the causes and nature of each. Discuss the difference between “comparing” and “equating.”

Some learners who feel that the historical or contemporary suffering and persecution of groups they identify with has not been addressed may be resistant to learning about the persecution and murder of others. Ensure learners have the opportunity to learn about other such issues, in different learning contexts and ensure that such considerations avoid becoming exercises in weighing relative suffering (see 3.5.2).

3.2.3 Be reflective about purpose and rationale when using written and visual materials – especially those of a graphic nature.

Images and text should be selected with care and for intentional educational benefits. Respect for both the victims of the Holocaust and for the learners in the educational setting demands a sensitive approach and careful thought as to what constitutes appropriate material. Using graphic images with the intent to shock and horrify is degrading to the victims and can reinforce stereotypes of Jews as victims. Images can also be insensitive to the sensibilities of learners in the room regarding human trauma or modesty. The Holocaust can be taught effectively without using graphic photographs or film footage.

As with the use of terminology (see 3.1.2), be aware of the source of the materials selected. The perpetrators generated many photographs, films, and documents that can be useful educational resources, provided that the context is made explicit. Educators should constantly question their use of sources and ask themselves what educational outcomes are served by using particular materials.

3.2.4 Individualize the history by translating statistics into personal stories

Give learners opportunities to see those persecuted by the Nazis as individuals. Educators can find methods to make the scale of the Holocaust and the numbers involved real to their learners. Many people will find it difficult to relate to the tragedy of the Holocaust if it is presented only in statistical terms. Repeated references to “the six million” risk subsuming communities and individuals into a faceless mass and attempts to envision the enormity of numbers can further depersonalize and dehumanize.

Instead, wherever possible use case studies, survivor testimony, and letters and diaries from the period to show human experience. Learners should be able to give examples of how each “statistic” was a real person, with a life before the Holocaust, existing in a context of family, friends and community. Emphasize the dignity and humanity of the victims at all times.

3.2.5 Create an opportunity to examine the complicated nature of roles people played rather than reinforcing stereotypes

Focusing on the stories of individuals, of moral dilemmas faced and choices made, can make the history of the Holocaust more immediate and interesting to learners and more relevant to their lives today.

Provide historical resources that enable learners to unpack the complex factors influencing human action. Show how real people made choices that contributed to the events that happened, by discussing that people’s actions were influenced by a wide range of factors such

as societal structures, economics, ideology and personal conviction and motivational factors. Terms such as “perpetrator,” “bystander,” “victim” and “rescuer” have developed over time in Holocaust studies to classify and analyze particular types of historical actors. Ensure learners understand that these categories are imposed on the past rather than derived directly from it. Human behavior is usually overlapping and fluid: A person described as a “bystander” in one context may have been a “perpetrator” in another situation or even a “victim” in yet another.

Take care to avoid reinforcing stereotypes that suggest that all rescuers were heroic, good, and kind, all bystanders were apathetic and all perpetrators were sadistic. Above all, underline that “victims” were not powerless but rather responding to difficult and stressful situations in ways conditioned by age, background and context. Particular care should be taken to ensure that easy generalizations about “national character” are avoided and are challenged if they arise.

3.2.6 Do not attempt to explain away the perpetrators as “inhuman monsters”

The motivations of the perpetrators need to be studied in depth: Learners can use primary sources, case studies, and individual biographies to weigh the relative importance of factors. Societal structures, economics, ideology, prejudice, propaganda, xenophobia, dehumanization, peer pressure, criminal psychopathology and motivational factors such as fear, power or greed all played roles in decisions made by individuals to participate or become complicit in the Holocaust. The intent is not to normalize but to understand how humans came to do what they did. Understanding is not condoning.

The Holocaust was a human event with human causes. Even as perpetrators committed inhuman acts, the majority were not sadistic psychopaths; labeling them as “evil” is not a sufficient explanation for the Holocaust. Instead, educators should try and help learners pose a different and more challenging question altogether. How was it humanly possible that ordinary individuals who committed cruel acts and murder against others including women and children could also be loving fathers and husbands, devoted wives or mothers?

3.2.7 Exercise caution when using simulations and role play

Beware of simulation, creative writing or role play exercises that encourage learners to imagine they were directly involved in the Holocaust. Attempts “to relate” can lead to false equivalencies or trivialization as learners try to find comparisons with their own lives. Some young people may over-identify with the events of the Holocaust and become excited by the power and even the “glamour” of the Nazis. Some may demonstrate a morbid fascination with the suffering of the victims. Learners with traumatic life experiences or family histories can also experience intense stress as they reconnect with those episodes through the historical exploration.

Consider implementing activities employing “observer positions” that more accurately reflect our position in relation to the past. For example, learners could be asked to take on the role of someone from a neutral country, responding to these events: perhaps 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 mobilize public opinion. Such activities can be good motivators for learning and also highlight possible courses of action that learners may take about events that concern them in the world today. Educators can foster genuine empathy through personal stories, case studies, and survivor testimony.

Be sure to engage learners in debriefing sessions after any role play, simulation or imaginative exercise. It is essential to gain an understanding of how learners have responded to and processed such material.

3.2.8 Encourage the study of local, regional, national, and global history and memory

In countries where events of the Holocaust took place, emphasize those specific events in the context of the national history of that period, without disregarding the European dimension of the Holocaust. This investigation might include the experience of victims, rescuers, perpetrators, collaborators, resisters, and bystanders. Educators should encourage and facilitate re-examination of common “national” narratives of the period.

3.2.9 An interdisciplinary approach can enrich understanding of the Holocaust

The events of the Holocaust reveal extremes of human behavior that cut across many fields of human experience. As a result, the topic is relevant to educators across a range of subject disciplines. An interdisciplinary approach can enrich learners' understanding of the Holocaust by drawing on different areas of expertise, approaching the Holocaust from multiple perspectives, and building upon ideas and knowledge gained in multiple fields of study.

Learning about the Holocaust through history evokes powerful emotions that poetry, art, and music can help learners express creatively and imaginatively. The Holocaust raises important moral, theological, and ethical questions that learners can explore in their religious studies, citizenship classes, or citizenship or civics classes. Learning projects and programs, both nationally and internationally, that bring learners together to study with peers from other parts of the nation or other countries can contribute to a better understanding of local, regional and global histories of the Holocaust.

This requires dialogue and cooperation between educators in different subject areas and perhaps locations to devise manageable learning objectives and complementary activities on a schedule which ensures logical development of knowledge and understanding. Digital learning platforms and communication tools can support learning activities for learners in different fields and locations.



3.3 CRITICAL THINKING AND SELF-REFLECTION

3.3.1 Indicate that the Holocaust was not inevitable

The fact that a historical event took place and has been documented 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 lends insight into history and human nature as well as better helping learners to think critically on the subject.

3.3.2 Discuss the complexity of history

Remind learners that complex events such as the Holocaust often generate more questions than provide simple answers. The desire to “learn lessons” from the Holocaust risks simplification to straightforward conclusions about right and wrong — the Holocaust happened because people failed to make the correct moral choices — and leads to a superficial reading of history. Rather, examination of the Holocaust raises questions about the nature of individual choice, the “problem of evil,” and the ways in which individuals come to terms - or not - with the past.

Allow learners the opportunity to study and investigate the Holocaust in depth, including the questions outlined in the “What to teach” section that address the dilemmas of victims, rescuers, persecutors and bystanders.

Additionally, discuss with learners the provisional nature — due to emerging or lost source material, for example — of historical “answers.” Encourage learners to see their work on the Holocaust as leading toward provisional understanding rather than a definitive answer.

Finally, although commemoration and education should remain distinct, commemorative practices can be a valuable way to address learners’ emotional needs after undertaking a demanding course of study.

3.3.3 Help learners to develop historical consciousness by studying interpretations and remembrance of the Holocaust

- **Encourage your learners to critically analyze different interpretations of the Holocaust**

Classroom learning and our understanding of the past is always influenced by broader cultural contexts. Academic and popular representations of the Holocaust through feature films, the mass media, documentaries, art, theatre, novels, memorials, and museums shape collective memory. Each interpretation or representation is influenced by the circumstances in which it was 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.

Create opportunities for learners to consider how and why such interpretations and 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. Help learners to understand that, while legitimate areas of historical debate exist, not all interpretations are equally valid.

- **Invite learners 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 on 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 wider community, such occasions can themselves be the subject of investigation and learning. Learners might be asked to consider how cultural influences shape memory and memorials, how their local community chooses to reflect on its past, how different groups select from history to construct their own narratives, whether their nation addresses difficult aspects of its national history, and how such commemorations differ from those in other countries.

- **Create the opportunity to reflect on the role of history for the constitution of meaning and identity in the present**

“Historical consciousness” acknowledges that every narrative of past events is shaped by the context in which the narrative is produced. Historical consciousness recognizes that our understanding of the past has meaning for individuals and groups in the present and will shape expectations for the future.

“Collective memory” is how a group of people remember a historical experience, often reflecting that society’s values, and pass that memory from one generation to the next. A collective memory is embodied, for example, in public remembrance days, museums and memorials, and other kinds of established national narratives. Enable learners to examine the ways in which they are part of a collective memory through public institutions and social bonds such as school, media, and family.

As learners encounter different historical narratives about the Holocaust, encourage them to ask questions such as:

1. Why do key aspects of these narratives vary?
2. What elements are present and absent in different narratives of the Holocaust?
3. What could be the reason for differences in emphasis between the different narratives?

Recognizing how our understanding of the past is influenced by cultural, political, and temporal contexts and identities today can empower learners to develop their historical consciousness.

3.3.4 Represent the Jewish people beyond the terms of the Holocaust

The Jewish people have a long history and rich cultural heritage. Ensure that the Jewish experience during the Holocaust is placed in historical context by showing life before and after. Enable learners to appreciate Jews to be more than dehumanized and degraded victims of Nazi persecution (see 2.4.2). Ensure learners understand the enormous loss to contemporary world culture that resulted from the destruction of rich and vibrant Jewish communities in Europe.

3.3.5 Avoid legitimizing distortion and denial of the past

Outright denial of the Holocaust might be rare, but distortion is a more widespread phenomenon. Both distortion and denial undermine critical thinking by ignoring and degrading historical evidence and a fact-based understanding of history.

Holocaust denial — defined by the IHRA as “discourse and propaganda that deny the historical reality and the extent of the extermination of the Jews” — is often ideologically motivated and part of a conspiratorial theory that is an integral part of modern antisemitism. The conspiratorial element in Holocaust denial is characterized by the allegation that Jews exaggerate or even manufacture the Holocaust as an historical event in order to gain financial advantage, influence or power. Deniers attempt to sow seeds of doubt through deliberate distortion and misrepresentation of historical evidence. Be careful not to unwittingly legitimize the deniers through engaging in false debate. Care must be taken not to give a platform for ideologically motivated 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.

In common with many other theories of conspiracy, Holocaust denial can trigger interest and curiosity amongst learners because these theories challenge established and widely accepted factual positions perceived to be held by those in authority. In this case, critical questions about the Holocaust are not necessarily based on ideological conviction, but can be motivated by an attempt to challenge established positions and test reactions from teachers or other authorities. In this case, try to ascertain the motivation for comments tending towards denial, either in a classroom discussion or a one-to-one conversation. Asking why these perspectives are important for learners can be a very useful starting-point for such discussions.

Holocaust distortion — “intentional efforts to excuse or minimize the impact of the Holocaust or its principal elements” — can be motivated by various factors. It includes but is not limited to minimizing the impact of the Holocaust and obfuscating Nazi Germany’s responsibility for the Holocaust by blaming other nations or groups. This also applies to denial and distortion related to the genocide of the Roma and Sinti which often depict the victim group as a criminal element deserving their persecution.

Distortion can be countered with reference to historical facts based on the historical evidence provided in primary sources and research literature. Reflection and curiosity about where the learners acquired misinformation and what motivated them to make use of it can help educators devise an appropriate reaction and strategize effective ways to handle incidences of distortion in the classroom.

In-depth exploration of Holocaust distortion and denial can and 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. The [IHRA Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion](#) can be used in conjunction with the definitions in this section and the glossary at the end of this document.

3.4 SOURCES AND RESOURCES FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

3.4.1 Provide learners with access to primary sources

Give learners the opportunity to critically analyze original source material and to understand that analysis, interpretation, and judgement must be based on a sound reading of the historical evidence.

It is in the letters, diaries, newspapers, speeches, 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 any serious attempt to understand why people made the choices they did or why events happened in the way they did.

3.4.2 Use witness testimony to create a unique link to the past

In addition to learning about history, incorporating first-hand witness testimonies help learners understand how events impacted the individual. Recalling events from a personal perspective gives the opportunity to differentiate between facts and reflections and also allows learners the opportunity to reflect on the nature of memory.

Some countries still have Holocaust survivors living within their communities. If possible, make contact with a survivor and invite her or him to speak. This provides a special educational experience. Other individuals who were directly involved in the Holocaust or who witnessed events firsthand (rescuers, liberators and others) also have powerful testimonies to give. Being in the presence of someone who experienced the historical events first hand can bring an understanding of the history not always achieved through other sources.

When inviting a survivor or witness to the learning environment, be thoughtful about preparation before, during, and after the experience in order to maximize the potential for learners to have a positive dialogue with the guest. Ensure that learners have a secure grounding in the historical events through additional primary and secondary resources. Remember that meeting with witnesses exists as only one means of transmitting historical knowledge. Consider studying the life-story of the individual in advance to ensure that enough context exists for a respectful and receptive exchange. Help learners to understand that although much time has elapsed since these events, the speaker can still find it painful to relate such intensely personal experiences. Encourage those meeting the survivor to ask not only about what happened to him or her during the Holocaust but also about his or her life before and after, so that they get a sense of the whole person and of how the survivor has tried to live with his or her experiences.

As the number of survivors and witnesses capable of telling their story to broader audiences decreases, video testimonies provide a strong alternative. Because of the complex nature of video testimony as a source, prepare lessons where testimonies are used in an interpretative way to support understanding rather than simple illustration of historical events. Instead of full-length testimonies, use clips of testimonies carefully chosen to meet the pedagogical objectives of the lesson. Take special care in choosing testimony clips that have deeper layers of meaning, so learners can explore testimonies from both cognitive and affective perspectives. Always provide historical context and the context of the interview.

One point of examination could include the time gap between the historical experience and the narration of the testimony. Learners can reflect on how the testimonial record is affected by the interview situation, by processes of historization and collective memory, and by the changing circumstances of the person testifying. The IHRA paper "[Teaching about the Holocaust without survivors](#)" has more detailed recommendations.

3.4.3 Be aware of the potential and also the limitations of all instructional materials

Evaluate the historical accuracy of all instructional materials and contextualize all evidence. Include personal stories, wherever possible with links to the local context or events. The use of diaries, letters, photographs, and other evidence from the victims and survivors can help to make their voices heard. Make use of case studies that challenge and subvert negative stereotypes of the victim groups that might be present in society or among the learning group. To develop critical thinking, ask learners to discuss the content and focus of textbooks and other instructional materials.

Note that much of the evidence of the Holocaust, whether written documents, photographs, or film, was produced by the Nazis. Be mindful that in reproducing Nazi propaganda, and using atrocity photographs or footage, some instructional material can reinforce negative views of the victims and objectify, degrade and dehumanize them once more.

Finally, be sure to consider learners' cognitive and emotional development. Ensure that images and text are appropriate and that learners have been well prepared for the emotional effect they might have. Provide space for learners to reflect and to discuss their reactions afterward.

3.4.4 Use of fictional and imaginative resources

Novels, novellas, poems and feature films about the Holocaust can never replace a thorough study of the historical events, but they can offer a personal approach and specific insights into the nature and the consequences of the crime. Works about the Holocaust of high aesthetic value are likely to create empathy and understanding by focusing on the individual experience of the victims and facilitating understanding of events. However, they can only achieve this if their language and composition avoid sentimentalization and kitsch.

Fictional resources should respect the specific events, facts and conditions of the Holocaust, without ahistorical manipulation and change. This principle extends to films based on biographical or memoir literature, which frequently conceal considerable liberties with the truth behind the phrase 'Based on a true story'.

However, fictional and imaginative resources can also:

- Develop critical thinking about historical narratives and develop historical consciousness;
- Facilitate interdisciplinary learning about the Holocaust;
- Help learners identify the language of discrimination and racism.

In addition, fiction can provide younger learners with a “managed” version of the past which frames the events in age-appropriate ways while maintaining historical accuracy. Illustrations in picture books can provide younger learners with age-appropriate visual stimulus that supports their learning.

The first challenge for educators is to find and use fictional resources which meet the criteria above. This means educators must have sufficiently sound historical knowledge to confidently differentiate incorrect information or distortion (fiction) from accurate or realistic historical facts (truth). Fictional resources are supplements not replacements for factual, archival resources. Educators should consult with colleagues teaching history to help find appropriate informational texts and historical enquiry to accompany their use of fictional resources.

It is every educator's responsibility to prevent misinformation about the Holocaust. This inevitably means that some fictional resources, despite their reputation, appeal or availability, are problematic and should not be used in teaching and learning about the Holocaust.

The novel and film *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* are frequently used in English-language classrooms. While the story may stimulate learners' interest, the details and narrative of both book and film are not faithful to the historical facts and create false impressions of victims, perpetrators and key sites. Investigating these problems through comparison with historical sources and evidence may be the basis of stimulating critical review by advanced learners, but learners with little or no prior knowledge are likely to acquire misinformation about the Holocaust that may never be challenged, much less un-learned.

3.4.5 Support learners to work critically with Internet sources

The internet is an indispensable media source influencing the knowledge, perceptions, and opinions of many learners. While it can be a valuable tool for education and research, educators and learners need to be careful and critical in their use of websites and social media. The best strategy is to recommend authoritative sites vetted with these recommendations in mind. Use the [IHRA International Directory of Holocaust Organizations](#) to find useful sites that can support needs. The IHRA's "[Roma Genocide: Overview of international organizations working on historical and contemporary issues](#)" can support work on the genocide of the Roma and Sinti.

Emphasize the need to critically evaluate all sources of information. Learners should understand the importance of considering the context in which information was produced, and be given tools and training to critically assess any sources. Encourage learners to ask questions such as those in the diagram below:

Is there an agenda?

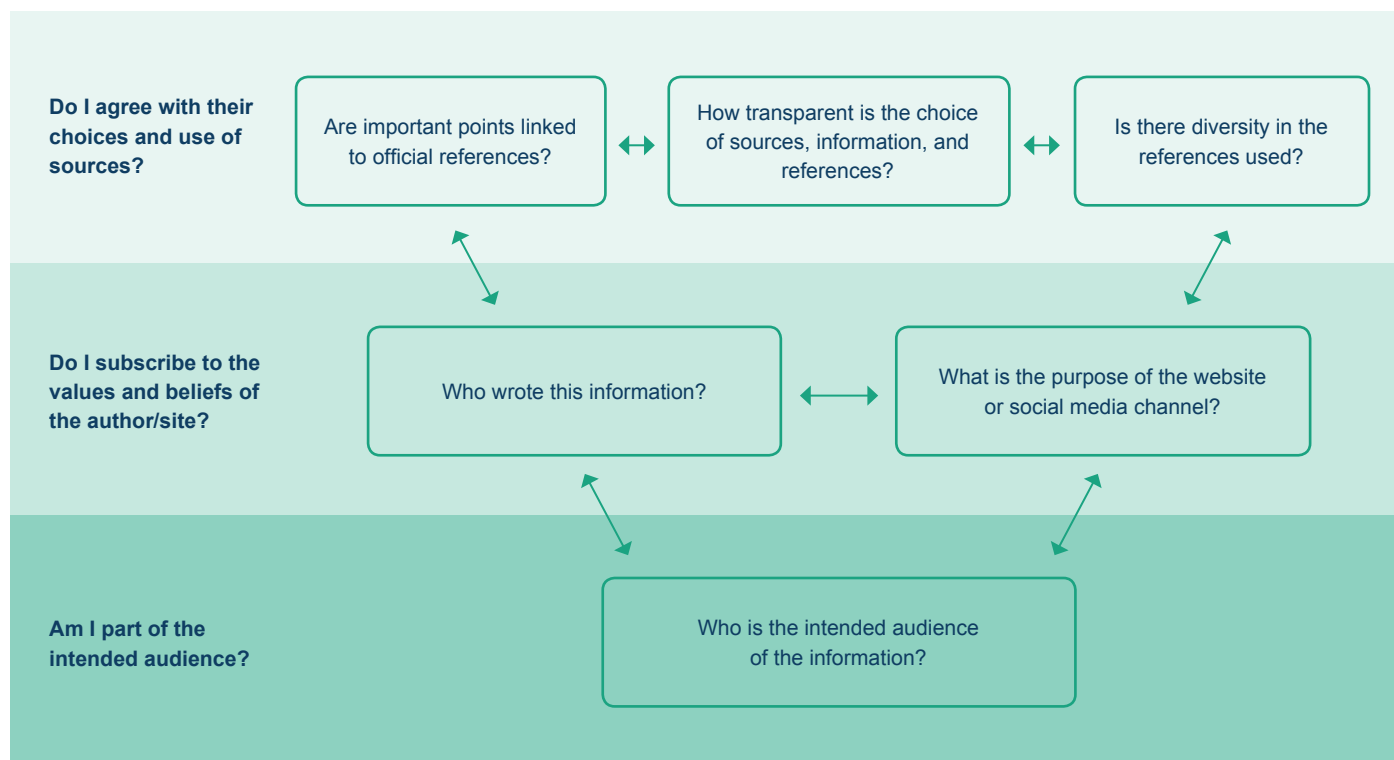


Figure 3. Sample questions for the critique of internet sources

Another important element of critical assessment of internet sources is to discuss the origin, originality and purpose of visual material such as photographs and film. Media literacy should be assessed and reinforced rather than assumed. Young people should be informed that some websites and social media channels are produced by Holocaust deniers, antisemites and racists with the express purpose of spreading misinformation and deceiving. They should be trained to notice and question relationships between the owner of a source and its contributors or respondents.

It can also be useful to identify different categories of social media, and discuss how they work, what the audience is, and why people use them. Social media includes:



Figure 4. Some examples of social media

It should be borne in mind, however, that the popularity and market penetration of particular sites or apps needs to be monitored, as these are subject to rapid and extreme changes. Being aware (within professional boundaries) of how your learners use social media can be an important part of contemporary education.

3.5 RELATING HISTORY TO THE PRESENT: THE HOLOCAUST, GENOCIDES AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

3.5.1 The dimensions of Human Rights Education and their relationship with teaching and learning about the Holocaust

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011) defines three dimensions of Human Rights Education. These dimensions are set out in Fig. 5 below, along with an outline of how they can be related to teaching and learning about the Holocaust.

Dimension 1	Teaching <i>about</i> human rights: understanding norms and principles of human rights.	The impact of the Holocaust on the formulation, codification and entrenchment of human rights, especially in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and the United Nations Genocide Convention.
Dimension 2	Teaching <i>through</i> human rights: using methods based on human rights approaches.	The use of active, learner-centered methods which empower and enhance discovery, in ways that respect, uphold and enhance the rights of learners and educators.
Dimension 3	Teaching <i>for</i> human rights: empowering learners to apply and uphold human rights principles.	Teaching and learning about the Holocaust can provide case-studies of mechanisms and processes that lead to human rights violations which can escalate into large-scale targeted violence such as genocide. Perspectives from peace, genocide prevention, or democratic citizenship education can also be used to analyze the events of the Holocaust.

Figure 5. Dimensions of Human Rights Education applied to teaching and learning about the Holocaust



3.5.2 Important points to remember when combining teaching and learning about the Holocaust with Human Rights Education

While teaching and learning about the Holocaust can be a powerful and accessible tool for Human Rights Education, educators should remember the following important points:

- a) All the suggestions in these recommendations about precision and accuracy of language and discourse as well as use of learner-centered methods apply to sessions incorporating elements of Human Rights Education.
- b) The specificity of the Holocaust and other human rights violations should be respected, and comparisons made cautiously. Comparing events requires detailed knowledge of each element being compared or risks ahistorical comparisons that hinder understanding and impede critical thinking and analysis. Educators should be honest and clear about their level of expertise about both the Holocaust and any additional events being examined.
- c) A clear distinction should be made between the Holocaust and the lessons that can be drawn from it. The past occurred in a particular way for particular reasons and oversimplification of historical facts or broader concepts to emphasize particular “lessons” serves neither learners nor educators. Educators should be especially cautious in imposing contemporary knowledge or values on those in the past. Primary sources and humanization of victims should highlight differences as well as similarities between various events.

- d) Educators should make a clear distinction between the perpetrators of the past and present-day societies. Judgments about “national character” should be avoided. For example, opportunities to study the varied responses of the German people to Nazi policies including enthusiastic support, cooperation, discontent, apathy, and active resistance are important. The same applies when collaboration is examined. Avoid using analysis about past behavior to provide simple explanations for present-day behaviors.
- e) Ensure that the comparison of genocides or human rights abuses does not lead to a hierarchy of suffering, whether past or present. The suffering of those targeted by the Nazis and their collaborators was potent and real and should not be used simply to evoke sympathy in the present. Likewise, suffering experienced by human beings in different contexts also deserves acknowledgement. The motives, policies, and procedures for creating conditions of discrimination, economic exploitation, persecution, and murder are often varied and complex - in both the past and present. Educators owe victims past and present an accurate understanding of their suffering on its own terms, and not relative to others.

Above all, it is important to remember that teaching and learning about the Holocaust is a discrete field of its own. Although opportunities exist in the careful and judicious merging of perspectives, when adopting a human rights-centered approach when teaching about the Holocaust educators must be mindful to avoid simplifying the historical context or indulging in ahistorical comparisons.

LIST OF KEY TERMS

Antigypsyism: racism against people considered to be “gypsies” although the main targets are usually **Sinti** and **Roma**.

Anti-Judaism: hatred and contempt towards **Jews** based on religious prejudices.

Antisemitism: The IHRA's non-legally binding [Working Definition of Antisemitism](#) which states that “**Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities,**” includes eleven examples of some of the ways that antisemitism appears today. During the period before and during the Holocaust, the Nazis and others targeted Jews with various forms of antisemitism. The effects of such antisemitism escalated from social prejudice, to legal restrictions, to mass incarceration, ghettoization, deportation, and murder.

Bystanders: states and individuals who were aware of the Nazi crimes and decided not to intervene, despite possessing some freedom of action, thus potentially reinforcing the perpetrators' determination to commit their crimes.

Collaborators: non-German regimes and persons who cooperated with the Nazis and actively supported their policies and carried out actions under Nazi orders and on their own initiative.

Concentration camps: institutions developed in Nazi Germany to imprison political enemies and opponents. Often situated in suburbs of major cities, the camps were a very visible indicator of the Nazi regime's willingness to use violence and terror. Inmates in concentration camps were held in inhumane conditions and subjected to torture, starvation, and, in certain camps, medical experimentation. After the outbreak of World War II, the German authorities expanded their concentration camp network. By the end of the war the network of camps included labor camps intended to exploit the forced labor of inmates; transit camps to assemble large numbers of victims prior to deportation, as well as camps of the pre-1939 type. The death camps were established in late 1941/early 1942 with the specialized function of mass murder.

Crimes against humanity: The definition in Article 6 of the Nuremberg Charter has been refined and completed by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted by the United Nations in 1998. According to Article 7, murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation or forcible transfer of population, imprisonment in violation of fundamental rules of international law, torture, rape and other grave acts intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health are viewed as crimes against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack.

Death camps/killing centers: camps that were established for the systematic murder of Jews and Roma. The Kulmhof (Chelmno) gas van station and the Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka camps served this purpose exclusively. Auschwitz, Majdanek and Maly Trostinetz contained facilities similar to those in the death camps as well as playing roles as **concentration camps**, labor camps or transit camps.

Einsatzgruppen: mobile killing squads of the Security Police and the Security Service of the SS. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 these units - supported by Order Police units and local collaborators - began to systematically kill Jews by shooting them and using gas vans.

Holocaust: the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and murder of Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945.

Holocaust denial: The IHRA's non-legally binding [Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion](#) reads: "Holocaust denial is discourse and propaganda that deny the historical reality and the extent of the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis and their accomplices during World War II, known as the Holocaust or the Shoah. Holocaust denial refers specifically to any attempt to claim that the **Holocaust/Shoah** did not take place. Holocaust denial may include publicly denying or calling into doubt the use of principal mechanisms of destruction (such as gas chambers, mass shooting, starvation and torture) or the intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people."

Holocaust distortion: The IHRA's non-legally binding [Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion](#) refers to a number of examples of attempts to cast doubt on the factuality of the Holocaust. These include (but are not limited to) gross minimization of the number of the victims of the Holocaust; attempts to blame Jews for causing their own genocide; and statements that cast the Holocaust as a positive historical event.

Genocide: Article 2 of the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (1948) defines genocide as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the convention on December 9, 1948. It entered into force on January 12, 1951 thus rendering the definition of genocide legally applicable. For various reasons, scholars have suggested different definitions.

Ghetto: district in which Jews were forced to live, segregated from wider society, during the Second World War. Most of the ghettos were in Central and Eastern Europe, but a few were established in territory annexed directly into the Third Reich between 1939 and 1941.

Human rights: rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, made human rights an important element of international law.

Human rights are not, however, purely the product of the twentieth century, but are visible in legal and religious codes stressing the individuality and dignity of the individual dating back to antiquity. Human rights have been an indispensable element of democratic ideas and institutions in Europe since at least the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, drafted in 1789 during the French Revolution.

Jews: Orthodox and Reform Judaism define a Jew as an individual whose mother is/was Jewish, or an individual who has converted to Judaism; Liberal Judaism additionally includes in the definition an individual who has a Jewish father. The **Nazis** defined Jews as individuals with three or four Jewish grandparents, irrespective of the religious beliefs or affiliation of individuals or their ancestors. It should also be noted that race laws were applied at different times and in different ways in various places occupied and controlled by the Nazis and their collaborators.

To further complicate the definitions, there were also people living in Germany who were defined under the Nuremberg Laws as neither German nor Jew, that is, people having only one or two grandparents born into the Jewish religious community. These “mixed-raced” individuals were known as Mischlinge. They enjoyed the same rights as “racial” Germans, but these rights were continuously curtailed through subsequent legislation.

Liberators: individuals who participated in the release and relief of suffering of those held captive or forced into hiding by the Nazis and their collaborators. The term is particularly applied to those soldiers, doctors and religious officials who entered the captured **concentration camps** in 1944-45.

Nazis: Germans and Austrians who were members of the National-Socialist German Workers’ Party or actively supported Hitler’s regime.

Perpetrators: individuals who planned, organized, actively promoted and/or implemented acts of persecution and murder.

Racism: institutional and/or individual prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one’s own race is superior.

Rescuers: individuals who helped victims of the Nazis in various ways with the intention to save their lives. Rescuers of Jews who helped without selfish motivations are often referred to as “Righteous (among the nations),” a title conferred by Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust Museum and Memorial based on analysis of testimony and documents to affirm that rescue was conducted for altruistic purposes rather than personal gain.

Resistance: activities aimed at impeding or inhibiting the Nazi’s criminal policies and programs. Since the Nazis aimed at the murder of all European Jews, helping and rescuing Jews can be considered a form of resistance from at least early 1942 onwards. Reference to specific local conditions is essential in understanding this term.

Resisters: individuals who actively opposed Nazi policies and programs through various means.

Roma and Sinti: the Roma and Sinti settled in the countries of modern-day Europe centuries ago. The term “Sinti” designates the members of an ethnic minority that settled in Germany and neighboring countries in the early 15th century. The term “Roma” refers to the ethnic minority that has lived in eastern and south-eastern Europe since the Middle Ages. Since the early 18th century Roma migrated to western Europe and settled there. Outside German-speaking countries, the term “Roma” is also used as a collective term for the ethnic minority as a whole. Like the Jews, the Sinti and Roma were declared to be “racially foreign” and were therefore excluded from the “people’s community.” Nazis persecuted people as “gypsies” who had at least one great-grandfather identified as a “gypsy.” This persecution escalated to genocide against the Roma who lived in countries under Nazi rule.

Shoah: a Hebrew word meaning “catastrophe” or destruction. The word used in Israeli culture to denote the **Holocaust**; it avoids the suggestion that the victims were “sacrificed” or “martyred.” It is also commonly used in France and other parts of continental Europe, where it gained currency after the 1985 film *Shoah* directed by Claude Lanzmann.

Survivors: individuals who lived through the events of the Holocaust, understood as the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and murder of Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. As well as those who survived **concentration camps**, **ghettos** and **Einsatzgruppen** shooting operations, this category includes Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in the 1930s and those rescued in operations such as the *Kindertransport*. It also includes children kept in hiding or given up for adoption to conceal their identity. *Second-generation* and *third-generation* refer respectively to the children and grandchildren of survivors.

Transitional justice: judicial and non-judicial measures implemented in order to redress legacies of repression, human rights abuses, and mass atrocities in period of political transitions, from dictatorial regimes or from civil conflicts to democracy, rule of law, and peaceful relations. Aside from criminal investigation and prosecution of perpetrators, transitional justice includes documentation of crimes, reparations, and provisions to guarantee non-recurrence.

Victims: individuals who were murdered by the Nazis or their collaborators, or who suffered severe losses because of their acts of persecution.

STOCKHOLM DECLARATION AND IHRA WORKING DEFINITIONS

STOCKHOLM DECLARATION

The Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust (or “Stockholm Declaration”) is the founding document of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and it continues to serve as an ongoing affirmation of each IHRA member country’s commitment to shared principles.

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, antisemitism 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 millenium, 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.

WORKING DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM

The non-legally binding Working Definition on Antisemitism was adopted by IHRA in 2016 and has since been adopted or endorsed by a number of countries and governmental bodies.

On 26 May 2016, the Plenary in Bucharest decided to:

Adopt the following non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism:

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

To guide IHRA in its work, the following examples may serve as illustrations:

Manifestations might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. However, criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic. Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for “why things go wrong.” It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.

Contemporary examples of antisemitism in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

- Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
- Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective — such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.

- Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
- Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).
- Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
- Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
- Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

Antisemitic acts are criminal when they are so defined by law (for example, denial of the Holocaust or distribution of antisemitic materials in some countries).

Criminal acts are antisemitic when the targets of attacks, whether they are people or property – such as buildings, schools, places of worship and cemeteries – are selected because they are, or are perceived to be, Jewish or linked to Jews.

Antisemitic discrimination is the denial to Jews of opportunities or services available to others and is illegal in many countries.

WORKING DEFINITION OF HOLOCAUST DENIAL AND DISTORTION

The non-legally binding Working Definition on Holocaust Denial and Distortion was adopted at IHRA's Plenary meeting in Toronto in 2013.

Holocaust denial is discourse and propaganda that deny the historical reality and the extent of the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis and their accomplices during World War II, known as the Holocaust or the Shoah. Holocaust denial refers specifically to any attempt to claim that the Holocaust/Shoah did not take place.

Holocaust denial may include publicly denying or calling into doubt the use of principal mechanisms of destruction (such as gas chambers, mass shooting, starvation and torture) or the intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people.

Holocaust denial in its various forms is an expression of antisemitism. The attempt to deny the genocide of the Jews is an effort to exonerate National Socialism and antisemitism from guilt or responsibility in the genocide of the Jewish people. Forms of Holocaust denial also include blaming the Jews for either exaggerating or creating the Shoah for political or financial gain as if the Shoah itself was the result of a conspiracy plotted by the Jews. In this, the goal is to make the Jews culpable and antisemitism once again legitimate.

The goals of Holocaust denial often are the rehabilitation of an explicit antisemitism and the promotion of political ideologies and conditions suitable for the advent of the very type of event it denies.

Distortion of the Holocaust refers, inter alia, to:

1. Intentional efforts to excuse or minimize the impact of the Holocaust or its principal elements, including collaborators and allies of Nazi Germany;
2. Gross minimization of the number of the victims of the Holocaust in contradiction to reliable sources;
3. Attempts to blame the Jews for causing their own genocide;
4. Statements that cast the Holocaust as a positive historical event. Those statements are not Holocaust denial but are closely connected to it as a radical form of antisemitism. They may suggest that the Holocaust did not go far enough in accomplishing its goal of "the Final Solution of the Jewish Question";
5. Attempts to blur the responsibility for the establishment of concentration and death camps devised and operated by Nazi Germany by putting blame on other nations or ethnic groups.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In addition to the IHRA's Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust, a variety of tools and resources exist to support this work. The list below identifies only a few...

For more information on how to explore the Holocaust in the context of genocide prevention, human rights education or examining violent pasts, consider reviewing UNESCO's *Education about the Holocaust and preventing genocide: A policy guide*. Published in 2017, this is currently available in English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Portuguese.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248071>

To bolster Holocaust context and knowledge, visit the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's online *Holocaust Encyclopedia* which contains hundreds of articles that feature key facts, content, primary sources, and critical thinking questions. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/>

For historical context about key topics to address explore the Yad Vashem's educational videos. <https://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-videos.html>

For more about teaching and learning about antisemitism, for which the Holocaust is included as an essential topic to teach, please visit ODIHR and UNESCO's *Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers*. Published in May 2018, this is available in at least seven languages. <https://www.osce.org/odihr/383089>

For more information about the genocide of the Roma and Sinti, these two online resources provide a good introduction: romasintigenocide.eu and romasinti.eu.

For more ideas on how to engage primary-aged learners with the Holocaust, visit Memorial de la Shoah's *Pedagogical Notes*: <http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/en/education-training/pedagogical-notes/primary-school.html>

For more about human rights education at Holocaust memorial sites, explore the European Agency for Fundamental Rights 2010 publication *Excursion to the past – teaching for the future: Handbook for teachers* available in PDF format in nine different languages. <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2010/excursion-past-teaching-future-handbook-teachers>



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