

THGAAC's Holocaust Remembrance Week Tips for Educators

Note: Not all subjects described below may be suitable for all grades/ages. Use discretion.



- Visit [THGAAC's Holocaust Remembrance Week Page](#) as your starting point for planning Holocaust Remembrance Week. This is the best place to learn about state requirements, recommendations for best practices, and officially approved classroom resources, as well as to access forms to provide student and educator feedback.
- Get to know [USHMM's Guidelines for Teaching About the Holocaust](#), beginning with the standard of clearly defining the Holocaust for students at the start of your lessons: *The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators.*
- The Holocaust was a specifically Jewish experience, but it teaches universal lessons. There is a real need to [resist the temptation to blur distinctions between victim groups](#). Do not universalize Jewish experiences in the Holocaust by conflating them with other atrocities in history, including other genocides committed by the Nazis and their accomplices. Each victim group deserves to be remembered and understood in its own historical context. Similarly, [avoid the false statistic of 11 million](#). Holocaust distortion is commonplace in our world, and it can creep into our lessons when we are not careful.
- Instruction should increase students' recognition of [antisemitism](#) as the chief driving force behind the Holocaust. This means that the persecution and murder of Jews was not a byproduct of other Nazi goals, such as empire-building; the Holocaust was the primary goal of Nazism, which saw the murder of all Jews as essential to the world's salvation. Also, make clear that antisemitism resembles other prejudices in some ways, but that it has its own distinct features and history. The Nazis did not invent antisemitism.
- The Nazis frequently accomplished their goals by abusing language or by using language to abuse human beings, so be careful with [how language is used in Holocaust instruction](#).
- Be aware that students will be inclined to see Hitler as the sole or main murderer of Jews and as the mastermind who "brainwashed" a generation of otherwise intelligent adults. This trope would absolve the killers of any responsibility for their crimes. It is therefore usually a bad idea to open and close the unit by focusing on Hitler (thus in a sense giving him the last word). Select resources that show who actually committed the murders and why they made the choices they made. More importantly, remember to expose students to the perspectives of the murder victims, [survivors, rescuers](#), and onlookers.

- Auschwitz, Treblinka, and other notorious Nazi “camps” were more than places where human beings were murdered, terrible as that alone would have been. These sites were also defined by their systematic torture, degradation, and dehumanization of those who were condemned to die. This is a theme of many [memoirs and short stories](#) that can help students approach an understanding of the concentrationary anti-world.
- While there is to be no denying the significance of the enormous network of camps in the enslavement, torture, and mass murder of victims, remember as well to teach that nearly half the victims never set foot in the camps. Introducing terms like *Einsatzgruppen*, ghettos, Babyn Yar, Shoes on the Danube, and [Holocaust by Bullets](#) can widen students’ perspective.
- Use caution if you elect to teach with Anne Frank’s diary. It is an officially approved resource for classroom instruction, but educators should be mindful of how (through no fault of the diarist) the diary reflects its author’s very limited knowledge of the Holocaust and how the diary and its adaptations have been twisted into a source of various Holocaust distortions, as [Cynthia Ozick](#) and [Alvin Rosenfeld](#) thoughtfully explain.
- Many Jews engaged in resistance, whether [armed](#) or [spiritual](#). Students should grasp how factors such as starvation and collective punishment often inhibited efforts to resist.
- Survival and [rescue](#) depended on many factors, not just hope and willpower, and were rare exceptions. Teach about them, but not only about them. Don’t let lessons distort the Holocaust by treating an exceptional narrative like a rule.
- The Holocaust really happened. Do not confuse students or trivialize the past by allowing instruction to call into question the factuality of the Holocaust. As educators, we do not waste time in the classroom debating whether the French Revolution or American slavery really happened, and a thoroughly documented event such as the Holocaust warrants no less respectful a treatment. Lacking any scholarly foundation, Holocaust denial is not “another side” to an authentic debate, but simply the same old hateful, deceitful, genocidal Nazism trying to poison young minds yet again. If students ask about Holocaust denial, inform them of [US Special Envoy Dr. Deborah Lipstadt’s response](#).
- FINAL NOTE: The Holocaust is a complex and fascinating subject, and even experienced educators cannot cover everything in one week. Fortunately, the law does not require that you do so, nor does it say that you cannot teach for longer than one week. The wide array of [resources developed or approved by the THGAAC](#) allows you to select the options that work best for your campus.

On behalf of the State of Texas, our Commission thanks you for the important teaching you are doing for Holocaust Remembrance this year.