

Education Working Group

Why Teach About the Holocaust?

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

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

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

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

and skills needed to understand and evaluate these cultural manifestations.