

TEACHING GUIDELINES

Described by scholars as a paradigmatic genocide, the Holocaust is a critical topic of study for students. However, it can also be challenging to teach and learn about such a large scale and complex historical event. To ensure that students safely engage with lessons about the Holocaust, it is essential to approach the subject with planning and care. Below are recommendations developed by international experts for teaching the Holocaust accurately, sensitively and effectively. Below are the VHEC's guidelines for teaching the Holocaust.

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST

1. DEFINE THE TERM *HOLOCAUST*

Begin by defining the Holocaust, drawing from a historically accurate and reliable source. Students should be able to articulate what the Holocaust was, where and when it took place, who was involved, and why and how it unfolded as it did.

2. BE PRECISE AND INTENTIONAL IN THE USE OF LANGUAGE

To avoid stereotypes, generalizations and over-simplification, it is important to choose terms purposefully and to discuss the origin and purpose of perpetrator terms when they arise. The sensitive use of language is also essential for creating a safe classroom environment for students.

3. INCLUDE PRE-WAR JEWISH LIFE AND THE HISTORY OF ANTISEMITISM

Understanding the diverse and vibrant Jewish life that flourished across Europe for millennia humanizes the victims of the Holocaust and underscores the magnitude of what was lost. It is also important for students to learn about the long history of antisemitism that was deeply rooted in European culture, and which laid the groundwork for the Holocaust.

4. CONTEXTUALIZE THE HISTORY

Help students understand the sequence of events, who was involved and where the events took place. This contextualization reinforces that the Holocaust was not inevitable but rather the result of choices and decisions made by individuals, institutions and nations over many years.

5. TEACH THE HUMAN STORY, NOT JUST STATISTICS

It is imperative for students to understand that the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust were human beings with families, friends, hopes and dreams. Educators should translate statistics into personal stories at every opportunity by incorporating survivor and eyewitness testimony.

6. BALANCE THE PERSPECTIVES AND TYPES OF SOURCES

The use of primary sources can help students analyse source material critically. Teach students to consider the origin of sources, how and why they were created and by whom. Encourage students to recognise biases and assess the reliability of each source.

7. DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE HISTORY OF THE HOLOCAUST AND THE MORAL LESSONS THAT MIGHT BE LEARNED FROM IT

When students encounter the Holocaust only through its moral lessons for humanity, the Holocaust is reduced to a metaphor and its historical specificity is obscured. Instead, the Holocaust should be taught as a specific historical event understood within the political, geographic and sociological contexts that led to its occurrence. Students should learn the facts, stories and nuances of the Holocaust before making meaning from it.

8. USE A STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH TO FOSTER A SAFE AND POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The Holocaust is a sensitive and heavy subject. Students should be encouraged to ask questions, share thoughts and engage in meaningful reflection. Educators play a crucial role in creating a space of mutual respect, where differing perspectives can be heard and valued.

9. ENCOURAGE THE STUDY OF LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL, AND GLOBAL HISTORY AND MEMORY

While the Holocaust took place in Europe, it was an event that affected, and continues to affect, people and communities around the world. Provide students with content relevant to a geographic location they are studying, including Canada.

10. AVOID DRAWING ANALOGIES BETWEEN THE HOLOCAUST AND CONTEMPORARY EVENTS OR POLITICAL SITUATIONS

Making analogies to contemporary events distorts and oversimplifies the Holocaust's complexities. Analogies detach the Holocaust from its historical setting, making it difficult for students to grasp the unique political, ideological and social contexts that led to genocide. This can lead to misunderstandings and false moral parallels that discourage critical engagement with Holocaust history.



LEARN MORE ABOUT HOLOCAUST PEDAGOGY

Consult the teaching guidelines created by our education partners: [IHRA](#), [USHMM](#), [Echoes & Reflections](#), [Azrieli Foundation](#).

ARE YOU TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST FOR THE FIRST TIME?

Our partners at the Azrieli Foundation created [The First Step](#), a foundational resource for educators who are teaching the Holocaust for the first time.