

ECHOES and REFLECTIONS

Leaders in Holocaust Education

Pedagogical Principles for Effective Holocaust Instruction

In order for students to understand the importance of the Holocaust as a historical event and as part of our shared human story, it is critical for teachers to have a sound pedagogy for instruction. Echoes and Reflections recommends the following “pedagogy-in-practice” principles for teachers to apply to their planning and implementation of a comprehensive Holocaust education program, allowing students to study this complex topic in a meaningful way and to ultimately apply what they have learned to their daily lives.

- 1. Define terms:** In addition to key terms like antisemitism, Holocaust, and genocide, review key terms and phrases necessary to fully understand the content being studied.
- 2. Provide background on the history of antisemitism:** Ensure students understand the role that antisemitism played in allowing the Holocaust to occur.
- 3. Contextualize the history:** Help students understand what happened before and after a specific event, who was involved, where the event took place, etc.; this helps to reinforce that the Holocaust wasn’t inevitable but rather the result of choices and decisions made by individuals, institutions, and nations over years.
- 4. Teach the human story:** While connecting people and events to the larger story, educators should:
 - Translate statistics into personal stories; use survivor and witness testimony whenever possible; emphasizing, however, that the survivor voices are the exception.
 - Highlight examples of how victims attempted to retain their humanity in the face of dehumanization (efforts to maintain identity and continuity of life, expression of values/beliefs, forms of resistance).
 - Stress the “choiceless choices” of the victims with limited or no power or escape.
 - Introduce prewar life/return to life of the victims to provide context for their choices, dilemmas, and actions.
 - Focus on the small and large decisions made by individuals who had the ability and the opportunity to choose between morally right and morally wrong decisions prior to, during, and after the Holocaust, including bystanders, collaborators, perpetrators, and rescuers.
- 5. Use primary source materials:** Enrich students’ understanding of the Holocaust by providing an abundance of print and digital resources representing a variety of perspectives.
- 6. Make the Holocaust relevant:** Connect what students are learning to contemporary events, while distinguishing between the unique history of the Holocaust and what can be learned from this history.
- 7. Encourage inquiry-based learning and critical thinking:** Support students’ sharing of ideas and asking questions of themselves and others.
- 8. Foster empathy:** Challenge students to understand people and their attitudes and actions in a historical context using sound approaches and strategies, refraining from the use of simulation activities.
- 9. Ensure a supportive learning environment:** Guide students “safely in and safely out” of this study; use age-appropriate materials and always be mindful of the social and emotional needs of individual students.

