



PREPARING TO TEACH THIS UNIT

Below is information to keep in mind when teaching the content in this unit. This material is intended to help teachers consider the complexities of teaching about the “Final Solution” and to deliver accurate and sensitive instruction.

- Students’ information about the Nazi extermination camps is often in the form of dates, place names, and numbers. While it is important for students to realize that millions of Jews died at the hands of the Nazis in the extermination camps, it is equally important that they see the victims of the Holocaust as individuals. They were mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, and grandparents; young and old; tradesmen, teachers, students, scientists, and doctors. They were artists, musicians, and poets. Reflecting on the Holocaust as a human story will make it more meaningful in students’ lives and will make them more likely to take the messages that can be learned from it to heart.
- In this unit, students learn about the amazing struggle for survival of Jews imprisoned in the extermination camps. It is important that students realize, however, that the vast majority of Jews who arrived at the Nazi extermination camps were murdered. Only a few were chosen to work and of those, very few survived the harsh conditions, the beatings, the lack of food, extreme weather, and forced labor.
- The “Final Solution” is the story of Jews in the time of the Nazis. In this unit, students learn about the extermination camps where most Jews were murdered. This is not to minimize the suffering of other groups and millions of individuals at the hands of the Nazis. The uniqueness of the Jewish fate is that the Nazis strived to murder all Jews and succeeded in murdering one-third. No other group was considered subhuman according to Nazi ideology and therefore deserving to be extinguished.
- The six extermination camps were located in occupied Poland. There were several important reasons for this: Poland had the largest population of Jews before the war, and Poland was considered a location where the Nazis could do as they pleased, without any concern for the Poles, who were considered inferior. In addition, Poland was far from the eyes of the Western Allies, yet it had a well-developed system of trains that made transporting Jews from all over Europe to Poland feasible. Even though these camps were on Polish soil, the Poles were not responsible for initiating the camps nor for the policies carried out in them. These were Nazi German extermination camps in Poland.
- This unit contains very difficult and complex subject matter. Teachers are encouraged to be sensitive to students’ reactions and to assure them that experiencing a range of emotions—anger, sadness, outrage, melancholy—are all natural responses to this kind of material, and that they should feel free to express and discuss those feelings with others. Caution should be exercised in using graphic images.