



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.

Guidance for Families

Supporting Your Child When Learning about the Holocaust

I. Introduction

The resource is designed for families to support their child’s learning around the Holocaust in school. We encourage you to use this resource to connect with, and reflect alongside, your child.

For educators, addressing the Holocaust and its various lessons with younger students requires (1) attention to the developmental, social, and emotional needs and capacities of this age group, (2) scaffolding of foundational concepts such as identity, prejudice, and empathy, and (3) focus on the principles of justice, allyship and resilience rather than the atrocities of the Holocaust. This early instruction, when done well, can help to create emotional and moral scaffolding, laying the groundwork for learning the more difficult and specific aspects of the history in later years.

Learning about this history in an age-appropriate way over time can help students understand the dangers of discrimination, antisemitism, and hate, and to develop an appreciation for the importance of respect for differences, standing up for others in need, and exploring what it means to be resilient.

II. Ways to Support Your Child’s Learning

Reflect on your own knowledge.

Use the opportunity presented by your child learning about the Holocaust in school to reflect on your background knowledge about this history. These resources below are for your knowledge, not your children.

- Explore the [Echoes & Reflections Timeline](#) to deepen your knowledge of the history from 1933-1945.
- Visit the [Echoes & Reflections Guidelines for Holocaust Instruction – Grades 3-6 webpage](#) to see how teachers might be addressing the difficult topics of the Holocaust with younger learners.
- Review the terms in this resource to help you answer questions your child might raise about the meaning of words they heard in the classroom lesson.
- Explore the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Encyclopedia of the Holocaust](#).

Be prepared for questions.

For many young learners – and many adults - why the Holocaust happened or how something like the Holocaust was possible is a difficult question to process. The brief history below and glossary of terms is meant to give you some background to help with the basic facts. For many questions, it may be best to encourage your child to ask their teacher.

Remember, learning about the Holocaust in school in upper elementary grades is meant to serve as a foundation for future learning. The goal with younger students is to provide a basic framework of what was happening, and to focus on individual stories and experiences of “light in the darkness” during this time.

Support any type of response your child might have.

Whether your child has been introduced to information or stories about the Holocaust or not, there are a myriad of emotions young learners might experience. Your child’s teacher will help your child process their emotions by involving them in debriefing activities and having classroom discussions.

Your child may continue processing their learning at home and express emotions including confusion, uncertainty, anger, sadness, curiosity, or even ambivalence. Talking about their feelings and reactions could help you know, in part, what they are taking in, understanding, and/or processing. Additionally, help your child recognize that students in school could be responding and processing it in different ways than them and how they might prepare for that.

Communicate with your child’s teacher.

If you have not received information about the unit from your child’s teacher, you may wish to contact them to understand their learning goals and/or the resources they will be using to teach about the Holocaust. If you are in any way concerned about your student’s emotional preparedness for the lesson or reaction after the lesson, you should reach out to your child’s teacher to discuss how you can best support your child’s learning and understanding.

III. Follow-Up At-Home

Offering opportunities outside of school to reflect on in-school learning can further support the aims of the lesson. The following questions are designed to spark reflection around how lesson content was understood, and what actions could be taken. You need not address all these topics; let your child’s responses be your guide. If your child has challenges in expressing their reaction to the content verbally, consider having them draw or write, or explore some other creative outlet, to process their learning and emotions.

Note: The specific books or resources being introduced at school should serve as the anchor for these conversations.

Content

- Tell me about the story/film/etc.?
- Who were some of the people you learned about? What do you think about their experiences?
- Was there anything that came up today that surprised you? Why?
- Why do you think the Holocaust is something you learned about in school?
- What questions do you have about the story/film, etc.?

Compassion

- Did learning about this story/history feel different than learning about other subjects?
- What are some connections you made to this story and other history or experiences you have learned about before?

- What did you learn about how people felt during this time (empathy)?
- What did you learn about how people responded with bravery and strength (resilience)?

Action

- When we learn about things that are sad and hard, what can we do with that learning and those feelings?
- Did this story, film, etc. make you think about anything you can do when you see someone doing something you know is wrong or treating someone unfairly or in a hurtful way?
- If your child is interested to learn more, you may wish to find a book to read together. Please see the [Echoes & Reflections book list](#).

IV. A Brief Background on the Holocaust: Upper Elementary Approaches

This text provides some background into what the Holocaust was and how it may be included in the works your child encounters in school. This is not a comprehensive description of the Holocaust, but rather a starting point for understanding. We provide this text for your background; it will not be identical to what your child is studying at school.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the Nazis, led by Adolf Hitler, were in control of Germany. They hated the Jewish people and passed laws to discriminate against them and make them feel like they were not part of Germany. During World War II, the Nazis decided to kill as many Jewish people as they could; in the end, during what became known as the Holocaust, they killed 6 million Jews. The Nazis also discriminated and killed millions of other individuals they felt were inferior.

Why the Holocaust happened is an important and big question to answer. One reason that Holocaust happened was **antisemitism**, hatred of Jewish people as individuals or as a group. This kind of **discrimination** existed before the Holocaust. The Nazi government and its collaborators, groups that worked with them, made antisemitic laws that took away Jewish people's rights and humanity. Many individuals, communities, and governments were **bystanders**, meaning that they knew different parts of what was happening and had the ability or opportunity to act, but made the choice not to do so.

During the Holocaust, some people resisted against the Nazis. In some cases, Jewish and non-Jewish people fought back with weapons. In other cases, Jewish people resisted by maintaining their humanity like continuing to practice Jewish traditions. Some non-Jewish individuals and families even hid Jews so that the Nazis would not be able to find them. People who were **allies**, a tiny minority of people in Europe spoke or acted in support of Jewish people, and some were able to rescue a number of Jews from Nazi violence.

V. Glossary of Terms for Younger Learners

Below is a list of vocabulary terms and concepts written in age-accessible language for young learners:

Antisemitism: Hatred of Jewish people as individuals or as a group.

Bystander: A person who is present at an event or who knows about it happening and has the ability or opportunity to take action but makes the choice not to do so.

Discrimination: Unfair treatment of one person or group of people because of the person or group's identity.

Holocaust:

Option A: A time in history when the German government, run by the Nazi Party, discriminated against Jews and other people they thought were inferior. They ultimately took the lives of Jewish people and many others.

Option B: In the 1930s and 1940s, the Nazis, led by Adolf Hitler, were in control of Germany. They hated the Jewish people and passed laws to discriminate against them and make them feel like they were not part of Germany. During World War II, the Nazis decided to kill as many Jewish people as they could; in the end, during what became known as the Holocaust, they killed 6 million Jews. The Nazis also discriminated and killed millions of other individuals they felt were inferior.

Jews: People who practice Judaism and/or its ethnic and cultural traditions.

Judaism: A religion practiced by Jewish people. Jews were the first group to believe in one God.

Nazi Party: A political party that gained power in Germany after World War I. The party's leader, Adolf Hitler, was a forceful leader who hated Jewish people.

Prejudice: Prejudging or deciding about a person or group of people without enough knowledge or information. Prejudicial thinking is often based on stereotypes.

Scapegoat: Blaming a person or group of people for something based on that person or group's identity when the person or group is not responsible. Scapegoating is used to shift peoples' negative feelings, like anger and hostility, onto the person or group of people being blamed.

Stereotype: An oversimplified and general idea about a person or group.

Swastika: The swastika is an ancient symbol meaning good fortune and well-being. The Nazis used the symbol and changed its meaning to stand for their power and to scare those who they disliked. Today, the swastika is still used by some people and groups as a symbol of hate.

Synagogue: A building or place of meeting for worship for Jews.