

## **Guidelines for Teaching the Holocaust**

There are many ways to incorporate a study of the Holocaust into a curriculum of various subjects. Far from merely a historical subject, the Holocaust delves into issues and concerns that are universal and relevant in the present day. To assist you in your teaching of the Holocaust, here are some suggested guidelines:

### **Try to avoid stereotypical descriptions.**

Though all Jews were targeted for destruction by the Nazis, the experiences of all Jews were not the same; likewise, all Germans cannot be characterized as Nazis, and not all Nazis were the same. It is important that in the study of genocide and persecution of groups who suffered stereotyping and generalization that we not use stereotypes and generalizations ourselves.

### **Avoid simple answers to complex history.**

A study of the Holocaust raises difficult questions about human behavior, and it often involves complicated answers as to why events occurred. Be wary of oversimplifications. Allow students to contemplate the various factors which contributed to the Holocaust; do not attempt to simplify or reduce Holocaust history to one or two catalysts in isolation from the social, economic, military, and political forces which came into play.

### **Contextualize the history you are teaching.**

Although a study of the Holocaust has ramifications for our society today, such a study must be undertaken in a historical context so that students can begin to comprehend the specific circumstances that encouraged or discouraged these acts.

### **Avoid comparisons of pain.**

A study of the Holocaust should always highlight the different policies the Nazi regime carried out against various groups of people; however, these distinctions should not be presented as a basis for comparison of suffering between them. In addition, one cannot presume that the horror created by the Nazis was any greater than that experienced by victims of other genocides; the true horror of the Holocaust lies not in the numbers, but in the policies of hatred and genocide carried out in a widespread, bureaucratic fashion.

### **Translate statistics into people.**

In any study of the Holocaust, the sheer numbers of victims challenges easy comprehension. The vast number of six million, which all but defies our grasp, was comprised of individual people: families of children, parents, and grandparents. First-person accounts and memoir literature may help provide students with a way of making meaning out of collective numbers.

### **Strive for balance of perspective.**

Often, too great an emphasis is placed on the victims of Nazi aggression. Most students express empathy for victims of mass murder; but it is not uncommon for students to assume that the victims may have done something to justify the actions against them, and thus place inappropriate blame on the victims themselves. It is important to not lose sight of the many perspectives, and place the Holocaust in its full historical and sociological context that does not limit itself to one point of view. Any study of the Holocaust should address the victims, the perpetrators of violence, and the bystanders, attempting to portray each as human beings capable of moral judgment and independent decision-making.