

Studying the Holocaust

The Holocaust was the systematic, state-engineered genocide of the Jewish people by Nazi Germany and its collaborators, resulting in the murder of approximately six million Jewish people, including one and a half million children. At the same time, other groups were persecuted by the Nazi regime and their collaborators.

The Holocaust was a defining event in the 20th Century that teaches us powerful and enduring lessons about humanity in shaping our world today.

Holocaust education can encourage students to explore the notion of diversity and ethical obligation and to build an understanding of the value of a diverse and cohesive society.

Characteristics of a quality Holocaust education program

The suggestions below draw on the eight [Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust](#) published by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), of which Australia is a member.

It is recommended that teachers:

- Focus on the inclusion of Jewish voices, either in primary source material, multi-media texts or testimony.
- Avoid reducing the Holocaust to dates, locations and numbers and avoid assessments that require the recall of such information
- Avoid focusing on Hitler -- focus instead on the experiences of the people and communities who were victims of the Holocaust.
- Use reputable websites for identifying learning resources -- for example, [Yad Vashem](#), the [Melbourne Holocaust Museum](#), the [Jewish Museum of Australia](#), the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#), The [Wiener Holocaust Library](#) and The [Simon Wiesenthal Center](#).
- Avoid being engaged by students, or supporting students to engage, in conspiracy theories or denial about the Holocaust.
- Do not use very graphic materials that are likely to be confronting or traumatising for students. While such materials can be powerful teaching tools, students should be led 'safely in and safely out' of the experience. Further guidance can be found via the [Teaching and Learning Resources —Selecting Appropriate Materials](#) policy.
- Refrain from engaging in role plays and simulations, where students are asked to take on the roles of Nazis, camp guards, prisoners or survivors.
- Avoid assessment that asks a student to "imagine if...".

- Do not offer assessment that positions, or supports students to position, the Holocaust as a contested area of history (contemporary antisemitism includes denying the Holocaust took place).
- Prioritise in-person and virtual tours and workshops (e.g. to a museum, library or centre) and incursions; local institutions (e.g. [Melbourne Holocaust Museum](#), [Jewish Museum of Australia](#)), authors, historians and survivors; incursions (e.g. [Courage to Care](#), [Click against Hate](#)).

Further supports:

Responses to commonly asked or difficult questions can be found on the [Echoes and Reflections](#) website.

Holocaust Background Reading and Viewing for Teachers

Educators who would like to increase their Holocaust-related content knowledge can access a list of professional learning and suggested background reading below.

Facts about the Holocaust:

[Introduction to the Holocaust](#) by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

- A short introduction to the Holocaust in The Holocaust Encyclopedia.

[Events in the history of the Holocaust](#) from theholocaustexplained.org (The Wiener Holocaust Library)

- A basic, easy-to-read timeline of key events in the Holocaust.

[Interactive timeline of the Holocaust](#) by Yad Vashem

- A video timeline of the events of the Holocaust.

[Step By Step: Phases of the Holocaust](#) from Facing History and Ourselves

- A six-minute video presented by Professor Doris Bergen.

[Frequently Asked Questions](#) by Yad Vashem

- Thirty-eight Frequently Asked Questions on the Holocaust.

[The Holocaust: 36 Questions & Answers About the Holocaust](#) from The Simon Wiesenthal Center

- Thirty-six Frequently Asked Questions on the Holocaust.

[Virtual tour](#) of the Melbourne Holocaust Museum

- A virtual tour of the Centre, covering pre-War Jewish life to liberation.

Understanding the Holocaust through survivor testimonies

[Ask a Survivor](#) by the Melbourne Holocaust Museum

- An interactive online experience, where participants can ask Holocaust survivors one of eighteen commonly posed questions. Note: designed for students but suitable for adult learners

[Eyewitness: the survivor's voice](#) by the Melbourne Holocaust Museum

- Forty 'Eyewitness' recordings of Australian Holocaust survivors, each of approximately fifteen minutes' duration, available on demand. Note: designed for students but suitable for adult learners

Creating a Safe environment for Studying Holocaust Texts

It is important that all students feel safe and respected when studying the history and themes of the Holocaust. The strategies below can help students and teachers support positive learning while studying a text:

- Use respectful and inclusive language when sharing information and ideas.
- Actively listen to others' experiences and perspectives.
- Frame comments as one's own ("I think") and avoid forceful language ("You should").
- When responding to others within the discussion, challenge ideas ("I have a different perspective..."; "I have some questions around that suggestion") rather than people.
- Share feedback with thoughtful consideration, drawing on strengths-based language and a positive attitude to others.
- Remember that the history you are studying is based on the experiences of real people. Be respectful when discussing victims, survivors and their families.
- Appreciate privacy – each participant has the right not to share.
- Demonstrate an active respect for the personal and cultural needs and aspirations of Jewish students, staff and/or visitors in the room.
- Step up and step back. Know when to let others share who may not always speak up first so that diverse voices and perspectives can be considered.
- Allow adequate time to reflect on and/or debrief discussion items.

Note: Make sure you know the students you are teaching and their specific needs, aspirations and experiences. If you have Jewish students in your class, consider checking in with them and their families before the lessons so that both they and you can best prepare for the lesson, with a focus on socio-emotional and cultural safety.

Explain that Jewish students are not obliged to share information but are more than welcome to speak up if they want to contribute or give feedback on the lesson.

Consider directing Jewish students to '[J-Voice](#)', a Jewish advisory group established by the United Jewish Education Board, to bring together Jewish students from primary and secondary Victorian government schools to share and discuss their experiences.

A lesson plan on creating a safe classroom space can be found on the Facing History website.

The Department provides curated and created [Holocaust Education](#) resources on FUSE.