

How to teach from/ about the Holocaust and Human Rights?

4.1 Methodological Approaches for Teachers' Projects: Values and Awareness Model

This subsection provides more details on how to find connections between the Holocaust and human rights, applying the **values and awareness model** of Human Rights Education.

Teaching the story of the Holocaust is vital for the understanding of the modern world. The Holocaust was a formative historical event and a turning point in human ethics that resulted in a collective reassessment of human rights in 1948. Hence, educators who teach about the Holocaust are essentially helping to shape the values of future generations, sensitizing others to violations of human rights and empowering others to contribute to the realization of human rights.

Key Didactic Approaches

Raising awareness of the ideological background of the National Socialist discrimination and extermination policies;

Centrality of the human aspect in the story of the Holocaust;
Demonstration of the gradual escalation of anti-Jewish policies by the National Socialist regime; human rights as a frame of reference for the analysis, reflection and discussion and the educational process; interdisciplinary method; and age-appropriate approaches.



1. Raising awareness of the ideological background of the National Socialist discrimination and extermination policy

The events of the past can only be explained and understood by taking into account the ideologies that served as basis for and paved the way to the National Socialist regime.

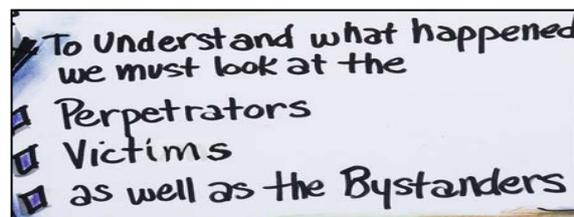
Racism, Anti-Semitism, and nationalism were all not invented by the Nazi regime, but the totality of Nazi racial ideology ultimately resulted in the planned destruction of the Jewish people in Europe.

Background knowledge about the history of racism and Anti-Semitism will help pupils understand why certain groups were dehumanized and deprived of their rights (including their basic right to life).

2. Centrality of the Personalization of History

Each individual of the millions of victims was a human being, with his/her inner world, belonging to a family and a Jewish community, with a rich cultural heritage. Students, and especially those of younger ages, can empathize with human beings, especially with those of a similar age to themselves. It is recommended to focus on primary source materials that highlight the voices of the victims who lived during that period rather than on fictional characters. Moreover, it is suggested to refrain from shocking unprepared students with horrible pictures of walking skeletons or with piles of dead bodies.

We recommend beginning instruction of Holocaust history with a focus on the image of **the Jewish world in the pre-war period**. It is important that students become acquainted with Jewish people's lives as ordinary human beings, before they recognize them as victims of merciless terror.



Victims

Jewish people during the Holocaust were not merely objects, but rather subjects that responded to what was happening around them. A key educational question is: How did the victims attempt to live in the world of chaos? It is especially important to present the moral dilemmas Jews faced in ghettos, forests or Nazi camps. In many cases they were forced to grapple with "choice-less choices" under insurmountable circumstances and inhuman conditions. It should be taken into account that the difficult ethical questions faced by the victims during the

Holocaust period cannot easily be compared with that of situations students come into contact today. The Holocaust was ultimately an extreme event.

The analysis in the classroom of the victims' lives should not conclude with the end of World War II. The human story continued. It is vital to dedicate special attention to the choices and dilemmas of Holocaust survivors following their loss of their families and communities as well as their efforts to rebuild their lives after the war. Why did they decide to emigrate? How did they overcome their loneliness, despair, and urge to take revenge. What are the educational messages of Holocaust survivors?

Perpetrators and Accomplices to Murder

The perpetrators were not beasts, but rather human beings. They made their moral and ethical choices. They chose to commit evil and violate human rights. They had a choice, even under the Nazi racist regime. This issue is still being researched by historians and other scholars.

Pedagogically it is significant to differentiate between the upper echelon of the Nazis and the more common perpetrators. The study of the motivations of the upper echelon usually leads to an abstract, academic discussion on Nazi ideology. Whereas the consideration of the motivations of ordinary killers may lend itself more easily to an educational exercise relevant to every human being. The fundamental ethical question here is how was it humanly possible for an average man to become a heartless killer, sometimes without being a member of the SS?

Bystanders

The majority of bystanders remained passively silent and often indifferent. Most of them simply went about their daily family lives some times in very close proximity to the Nazi extermination camps. In keeping with the approach laid out above, the rescuers were not angels, but normal people.

Educators are advised to include personal testimonies or interviews in their projects. For more information about the tiny minority of those who rescued Jewish people during the Holocaust, known as the Righteous among the Nations, see: <http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/index.asp>.

3. Escalation of Discrimination and Persecution

With the Nazi rise to power in 1933 and the virulent anti-Semitic propaganda, a slow but systematic process of removal of Jewish people (i.e. those defined by the National Socialist regime as Jewish) from the rest of the German society commenced. The world economic crisis and high unemployment accentuated existing anti-Semitic views and attitudes in society and led to indifference or even to sympathy of the local population for the dismissal and replacement of Jews in positions of government, academia, medicine, banking, economics etc. and for their segregation or even exclusion in the education system.

Gradually, step-by-step, the public in Germany and elsewhere, became accustomed to perceiving Jews as an enemy within society deprived of their rights which later made it much easier to deport them to the ghettos and concentration camps and eventually to kill them. Nazi anti-Jewish legislation, culminating in the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 stigmatized Jews and isolated them from society. After the so-called Kristallnacht pogrom in 1938, Jews in effect became outcasts in their native country.

4. Human rights as a frame of reference for the analysis, reflection, discussion and the educational process

As a frame of reference, human rights can serve the analysis, reflection and discussion of the Holocaust – underlining the focus on the human dignity and human existence and the relevance of their protection in today's and future society –, can enrich the educational process with a clear model for the relation between the understanding of the past, present and future and the building of a better present and future, and can emphasize the significance that the educational process as a process (access, learning environment, methods) is coherent to its own content.

5. Interdisciplinary Approach

Despite the fact that our studies are based on historical research and the broad historical context, students often gain a deeper understanding into this period through literature, art, music, theology, sociology, psychology, etc.

However, it is important to note that when teaching about the Holocaust, educators should focus on using primary sources.¹

6. Age-Appropriate Approach

For many years it was believed that the history of Holocaust, with all its horrors, and extreme manifestations of human cruelty, which at times seemed beyond comprehension should not be taught to children under the age of fifteen. In the twenty-first century, however, children have access to almost any kind of information without supervision and the start of ethics education should be introduced very early on. Although some educators may find it difficult to address the history of the Holocaust with younger students, the Holocaust Education can be successfully taught in a spiral manner, following consultation with psychologists. Information is conveyed in a step-by-step manner progressing from the particular stories to the more general history. For example:

in elementary school one biography may be studied (age 9-12),
in middle school one community may be explored and (age 12-14)

in high school more global questions of responsibility, justice and historical perspectives may be discussed (ages 15-18).



4.2 Methodological Approach for Teachers' Projects: Transformation Model

Given the complexity of the historic material, historical context is vital. The transformational model uses participatory and integrative methodology, which allows students to co-decide on topics, methodologies and content, which not only leads to high motivation of the students, but ultimately empowers them to apply their knowledge of human rights and of the Holocaust in their lives. In this model, it is important to encourage action oriented thinking that supports young people in finding ways to act in relation to contemporary human rights questions, but also in relation to questions of policies of memory.

The FRA proposes to see education about the Holocaust and Human Rights Education as two interconnected educations that build up on each other. If the history of the Holocaust is taken as the starting point for education towards transformation, then the second part (i.e. Human Rights Education) would allow having an emphasis on respecting diversity and on regarding equality and non-discrimination as positive values that need to be defended in the present and in the future.

Practical Techniques

Bridging the historical knowledge of the Holocaust and human rights framework

Peer centered didactic approach

Encouraging students to study about youngsters who were the same age during the Holocaust

Giving human rights a meaning

Acknowledging diversity and promoting equality and non-discrimination

Empowering young individuals to keep themselves informed and to have an impact on society.

1. Bridging the historical knowledge of the Holocaust and human rights framework

The combination of Holocaust Education and Human Rights Education should be based on historical facts as well, aiming to sensitize students.

Holocaust Education and Human Rights Education together should include reflection and discussion of the justification and the reasons why every human being is a holder of human rights. Combined Holocaust Education and Human Rights Education-perspective reinforces the relevance of a historical reflection of the Holocaust for today's society as it reminds us what the denial of human rights means and makes clear that the respect and the protection of human rights will always remain an essential task of humankind.

Caution should be taken when comparing the Holocaust to all human rights violations.

The transfer of knowledge on the normative human rights background and values and attitudes further needs to be linked to practical competencies applicable in the immediate environment of youth to actually ensure human rights implementation and to act and/ or support action in line with core human rights values.

¹ This methodological approach has been particularly highlighted in the project from Hungary featured in this Toolkit.

2. Peer-centered didactic approach

A focus is recommended on Jewish children's lives before and during the Holocaust, showing how their normal everyday lives dramatically changed. This allows students to develop deeper empathy towards youngsters who were the same age during the Holocaust.

3. Giving human rights a meaning

Normative learning objectives should allow for transmitting the history of human rights but should focus on deepening the knowledge of those rights that have been highlighted in the activities and exercises.

Emphasis should be given on balanced information on rights awareness and duty awareness, the dehumanization and persecution of parts of the population and of the responsibilities of duty bearers.

4. Acknowledging diversity and promoting equality and non-discrimination

During the educational process students should become aware that the societies they live in are diverse.

The educational process should highlight the importance to ensure equality and non-discrimination in society should encourage students to make use of their opportunities in society and be sensitive to others.

5. "Empowering" young individuals to keep themselves informed and to have an impact on society

The combination of Holocaust Education and Human Rights Education should empower young individuals to exercise or defend their own and others' human rights. And the students should be encouraged to acquire various skills needed to safeguard human rights (such as communication, campaigning, organizing exhibitions, setting up websites, writing an article, producing visual material, gathering information, participation etc.).

