Unit teaching of History

**“ANNA FRANK IN THE WORLD 1929-1945”**

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| **Purpose**  To use the story of a young girl, Anne Frank, as a catalyst in an effort to understand better the four themes of the Exhibit:   1. Discrimination is cruel and irrational. 2. It is the ordinary citizen who discriminates. 3. Discrimination is a matter of personal choice. 4. Discrimination, prejudice, and racism not only existed in the past, but still exist today.   These four themes are repeated in the Picturing the Themes worksheet in the folder. While these are the organizing themes for the Exhibit, they can also be used for lessons with classes that cannot attend the Exhibit but want to explore the nature of discrimination in order to intervene and to promote harmony, peace, and justice in the world of the future.  **Goals**   * Students will be exposed to a variety of lessons on discrimination that will increase their sensitivity to diversity. * Students will compare/contrast past and present discrimination issues. * Students will examine/identify attitudes toward discrimination. * Students will identify personal biases and formulate a plan to "make a difference." * Students’ intellectual curiosity will be engaged in order to inspire critical thought and personal growth.   A study of the Holocaust helps students think about the use and abuse of power, and the role and responsibilities of individuals, organizations, and nations when confronted with civil rights violations and/or policies of genocide.  **Options**  Enrichment activities and challenge activities for high performance students are suggested for each lesson.  **Vocabulary:**   * Bias * Discriminate * euthanasia * Gestapo * Holocaust * irrational * Jew/Jude * National Socialist/Nazi * prejudice * propaganda * racism * scapegoat * stereotype * Westerbork |
| http://www.uen.org/annefrank/images/shim.gif |

**Methodological Considerations**

1. Define what you mean by "Holocaust"

The Holocaust refers to a specific event in 20th century history: The systematic, bureaucratic annihilation of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and their collaborators as a central act of state during World War II. In 1933 approximately nine million Jews lived in the 21 countries of Europe that would be occupied by Germany during the war. By 1945 two out of every three European Jews had been killed. Although Jews were the primary victims, up to one half million Gypsies and at least 250,000 mentally or physically disabled persons were also victims of genocide. As Nazi tyranny spread across Europe from 1933 to 1945, millions of other innocent people were persecuted and murdered. More than three million Soviet prisoners of war were killed because of their nationality. Poles, as well as other Slavs, were targeted for slave labor, and as a result of the Nazi terror, almost two million perished. Homosexuals and others deemed "anti-social" were also persecuted and often murdered. In addition, thousands of political and religious dissidents such as communists, socialists, trade unionists, and Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted for their beliefs and behavior and many of these individuals died as a result of maltreatment.

2. Avoid comparisons of pain.

A study of the Holocaust should always highlight the different policies carried out by the Nazi regime towards various groups of people; however, these distinctions should not be presented as a basis for comparison of suffering between them. Avoid generalizations which suggest exclusivity, such as "the victims of the Holocaust suffered the most cruelty ever faced by a people in the history of humanity." One cannot presume that the horror of an individual, family or community destroyed by the Nazis was any greater than that experienced by victims of other genocides.

3. 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 reduce Holocaust history to one or two catalysts in isolation from the other factors which came into play. For example, the Holocaust was not simply the logical and inevitable consequence of unbridled racism. Rather, racism, combined with centuries-old bigotry, renewed by a nationalistic fervor which emerged in Europe in the latter half of the 19th century, fueled by Germany's defeat in World War I and its national humiliation following the Treaty of Versailles, exacerbated by worldwide economic hard times, the ineffectiveness of the Weimar Republic, and international indifference, and catalyzed by the political charisma, militaristic inclusiveness, and manipulative propaganda of Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime, contributed to the eventuality of the Holocaust.

4. Just because it happened, doesn't mean it was inevitable.

Too often, students have the simplistic impression that the Holocaust was inevitable. Just because an historical event took place, and it was documented in textbooks and on film, does not mean that it had to happen. This seemingly obvious concept is often overlooked by students and teachers alike. The Holocaust took place because individuals, groups, and nations made decisions to act or not to act. By focusing on those decisions, we gain insight into history and human nature, and we can better help our students to become critical thinkers.

5. Strive for precision of language.

Any study of the Holocaust touches upon nuances of human behavior. Because of the complexity of the history, there is a temptation to overgeneralize and thus to distort the facts (e.g., "all concentration camps were killing centers" or "all Germans were collaborators").The students have to distinguish between categories of behavior and relevant historical references; to clarify the differences between prejudice and discrimination, collaborators and bystanders, armed and spiritual resistance, direct orders and assumed orders, concentration camps and killing centers, and guilt and responsibility.

Words that describe human behavior often have multiple meanings. Resistance, for example, usually refers to a physical act of armed revolt. During the Holocaust, it also meant partisan activism that ranged from smuggling messages, food, and weapons to actual military engagement. But, resistance also embraced willful disobedience: continuing to practice religious and cultural traditions in defiance of the rules; creating fine art, music and poetry inside ghettos and concentration camps. For many, simply maintaining the will to remain alive in the face of abject brutality was the surest act of spiritual resistance.

6. Make careful distinctions about sources of information.

Students need practice in distinguishing between fact, opinion, and fiction; between primary and secondary sources, and between types of evidence such as court testimonies, oral histories, and other written documents. Students should be encouraged to consider why a particular text was written, who the intended audience was, whether there were any biases inherent in the information, any gaps in discussion, whether gaps in certain passages were inadvertent or not, and how the information has been used to interpret various events.

Because scholars often base their research on different bodies of information, varying interpretations of history can emerge. Consequently, all interpretations are subject to analytical evaluation. Only by refining their own "hermeneutic of suspicion" can students mature into readers who discern the difference between legitimate scholars who present competing historical interpretations, and those who distort or deny historical fact for personal or political gain.

7. Try to avoid stereotypical descriptions.

Though all Jews were targeted for destruction by the Nazis, the experiences of all Jews were not the same. Simplistic views and stereotyping take place when groups of people are viewed as monolithic in attitudes and actions. How ethnic groups or social clusters are labeled and portrayed in school curricula has a direct impact on how students perceive groups in their daily lives. The students have to understand that although members of a group may share common experiences and beliefs, generalizations about them, without benefit of modifying or qualifying terms (e.g., "sometimes," "usually," "in many cases but not all") tend to stereotype group behavior and distort historical reality. Thus, all Germans cannot be characterized as Nazis, nor should any nationality be reduced to a singular or one-dimensional description.

8. Do not romanticize history to engage students' interest.

One of the great risks of Holocaust education is the danger of fostering cynicism in our students by exposing them to the worst of human nature. People who risked their lives to rescue victims of Nazi oppression provide useful and important role models for students, yet an overemphasis on heroic tales in a unit on the Holocaust results in an inaccurate and unbalanced account of the history. It is important to bear in mind that "at best, less than one-half of one percent of the total population [of non-Jews] under Nazi occupation helped to rescue Jews."

9. Contextualize the history you are teaching.

Events of the Holocaust, and particularly how individuals and organizations behaved at that time, must be placed in an historical context so that students can begin to comprehend the circumstances that encouraged or discouraged these acts.

Students should be reminded that individuals and groups do not always fit neatly into the same categories of behavior. The very same people did not always act consistently as "bystanders," "collaborators," "perpetrators," or "rescuers." Individuals and groups often behaved differently depending upon changing events and circumstances. The same person who in 1933 might have stood by and remained uninvolved while witnessing social discrimination of Jews, might later have joined up with the SA and become a collaborator or have been moved to dissent vocally or act in defense of Jewish friends and neighbors.

The students have not to categorize groups of people only on the basis of their experiences during the Holocaust: contextualization is critical so that victims are not perceived only as victims. Although Jews were the central victims of the Nazi regime, they had a vibrant culture and long history in Europe prior to the Nazi era. By exposing students to some of the cultural contributions and achievements of two thousand years of European Jewish life, the students can balance their perception of Jews as victims and to better appreciate the traumatic disruption in Jewish history caused by the Holocaust.

Similarly, students may know very little about Gypsies, except for the negative images and derogatory descriptions promulgated by the Nazis. Students would benefit from a broader viewpoint, learning something about Gypsy history and culture, and understanding the diverse ways of life among different Gypsy groups.

10. Translate statistics into people.

In any study of the Holocaust, the sheer number of victims challenges easy comprehension. Teachers need to show that individual people are behind the statistics, comprised of families of grandparents, parents, and children. First-person accounts and memoir literature provide students with a way of making meaning out of collective numbers. Although students should be careful about overgeneralizing from first-person accounts such as those from survivors, journalists, relief workers, bystanders, and liberators, personal accounts can supplement a study of genocide by moving it "from a welter of statistics, remote places and events, to one that is immersed in the 'personal' and 'particular.'"

12. Strive for balance in establishing whose perspective informs your study of the Holocaust.

Often, too great an emphasis is placed on the victims of Nazi aggression, rather than on the victimizers who forced people to make impossible choices or simply left them with no choice to make. 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 to place inappropriate blame on the victims themselves.

There is also a tendency among students to glorify power, even when it is used to kill innocent people. Many teachers indicate that their students are intrigued and in some cases, intellectually seduced, by the symbols of power which pervaded Nazi propaganda (e.g., the swastika, Nazi flags and regalia, Nazi slogans, rituals, and music). Rather than highlight the trappings of Nazi power, teachers should ask students to evaluate how such elements are used by governments (including our own) to build, protect, and mobilize a society. Students should be encouraged to contemplate as well how such elements can be abused and manipulated by governments to implement and legitimize acts of terror and even genocide.

In any review of the propaganda used to promote Nazi ideology, Nazi stereotypes of targeted victim groups, and the Hitler regime's justifications for persecution and murder, teachers need to remind students that just because such policies and beliefs are under discussion in class does not mean they are acceptable. It would be a terrible irony if students arrived at such a conclusion.

Furthermore, any study of the Holocaust should address both the victims and the perpetrators of violence, and attempt to portray each as human beings, capable of moral judgment and independent decision-making but challenged by circumstances which made both self-defense and independent thought not merely difficult but perilous and potentially lethal.

13. Select appropriate learning activities.

Just because students favor a certain learning activity does not necessarily mean that it should be used. For example, such activities as word scrambles, crossword puzzles, and other gimmicky exercises tend not to encourage critical analysis, but lead instead to low level types of thinking and, in the case of Holocaust curricula, trivialize the importance of studying this history. When the effects of a particular activity run counter to the rationale for studying the history, then that activity should not be used.

Similarly, activities that encourage students to construct models of killing camps should also be reconsidered since any assignment along this line will almost inevitably end up being simplistic, time-consuming, and tangential to the educational objectives for studying the history of the Holocaust.

The activity may engage students, but they often forget the purpose of the lesson, and even worse, they are left with the impression at the conclusion of the activity that they now know what it was like during the Holocaust.

Holocaust survivors and eyewitnesses are among the first to indicate the grave difficulty of finding words to describe their experiences. Even more revealing, they argue the virtual impossibility of trying to simulate accurately what it was like to live on a daily basis with fear, hunger, disease, unfathomable loss, and the unrelenting threat of abject brutality and death.

The problem with trying to simulate situations from the Holocaust is that complex events and actions are over-simplified, and students are left with a skewed view of history. Since there are numerous primary source accounts, both written and visual, as well as survivors and eyewitnesses who can describe actual choices faced and made by individuals, groups, and nations during this period, teachers should draw upon these resources and refrain from simulation games that lead to a trivialization of the subject matter.

If they are not attempting to recreate situations from the Holocaust, simulation activities can be used effectively, especially when they have been designed to explore varying aspects of human behavior such as fear, scapegoating, conflict resolution, and difficult decision-making. Asking students in the course of a discussion, or as part of a writing assignment, to consider various perspectives on a particular event or historical experience is fundamentally different from involving a class in a simulation game.

14. Reinforce the objectives of the lesson plan.

As in all teaching situations, the opening and closing lessons are critically important. A strong opening should serve to dispel misinformation students may have prior to studying the Holocaust. It should set a reflective tone, move students from passive to active learners, indicate to students that their ideas and opinions matter, and establish that this history has multiple ramifications for themselves as individuals and as members of society as a whole.

A strong closing should emphasize synthesis by encouraging students to connect this history to other world events as well as the world they live in today. Students should be encouraged to reflect on what they have learned and to consider what this study means to them personally and as citizens of a democracy. Most importantly, your closing lesson should encourage further examination of Holocaust history, literature, and art.

**Incorporating a Study of the Holocaust into Existing Courses**

The Holocaust can be effectively integrated into various existing courses within the school curriculum. This section presents sample rationale statements and methodological approaches for incorporating a study of the Holocaust in seven different courses. Each course synopsis constitutes a mere fraction of the various rationales and approaches currently used by educators. Often, the rationales and methods listed under one course can be applied as well to other courses. United States History Although the history of the United States is introduced at various grade levels throughout most school curricula, all states require students to take a course in United States history at the high school level. Including a study of the Holocaust into U.S. History courses can encourage students to:

* examine the dilemmas that arise when foreign policy goals are narrowly defined, as solely in terms of the national interest, thus denying the validity of universal moral and human priorities;
* understand what happens when parliamentary democratic institutions fail;
* examine the responses of governmental and non-governmental organizations in the United States to the plight of Holocaust victims (e.g., the Evian Conference, the debate over the Wagner-Rogers bill to assist refugee children, the ill-fated voyage of the S.S. St. Louis, the Emergency Rescue Committee, the rallies and efforts of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, and the decision by the U.S. not to bomb the railroad lines leading into Auschwitz);
* explore the role of American and Allied soldiers in liberating victims from Nazi concentration camps and killing centers, using, for example, first-person accounts of liberators to ascertain their initial responses to, and subsequent reflections about, what they witnessed; and examine the key role played by the U.S. in bringing Nazi perpetrators to trial at Nuremberg and in other war crimes trials.

Since most history and social studies teachers in the United States rely upon standard textbooks, they can incorporate the Holocaust into regular units of study such as the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War.

**EVALUATION TESTS**

The Great Depression:

How did the U.S. respond to the Depression?

How were U.S. electoral politics influenced by the Depression?

What were the immediate consequences of the Depression on the European economic and political system established by the Versailles Treaty of 1919?

What was the impact of the Depression upon the electoral strength of the Nazi party in Germany?

Was the Depression a contributing factor to the Nazis' rise to power?

World War II:

What was the relationship between the U.S. and Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1939?

How did the actions of Nazi Germany influence U.S. foreign policy?

What was the response of the U.S. Government and non-governmental organizations to the unfolding events of the Holocaust?

What was the role of the U.S. in the war crimes trials?

The Cold War:

How did the rivalries between the World War II allies influence American attitudes toward former Nazis?

What was the position of America's European allies toward members of the former Nazi regime?

World History

Although various aspects of world history are incorporated throughout school curricula, most students are not required to take World History courses. It is in the context of World History courses, however, that the Holocaust is generally taught. Inclusion of the Holocaust in a World History course helps students to:

examine events, deeds, and ideas in European history that contributed to the Holocaust, such as the history of anti Semitism in Europe, 19th century race science, the rise of German nationalism, the defeat of Germany in World War I, and the failure of the Weimar Republic to govern successfully; reflect upon the idea that civilization has been progressing [one possible exercise might be to have students develop a definition of "civilization" in class, and then have them compare and contrast Nazi claims for the "1000 Year Reich" with the actual policies they employed to realize that vision; the dissonance raised in such a lesson helps students to see that government policies can encompass evil, particularly when terror and brute force crush dissent];

explore how the various policies of the Nazi regime were interrelated (e.g., the connections between establishing a totalitarian government, carrying out racial policies, and waging war); and

reflect upon the moral and ethical implications of the Nazi era as a watershed in world history (e.g., the systematic planning and implementation of a government policy to kill millions of people; the use of technological advances to carry out mass slaughter; the role of Nazi collaborators, and the role of bystanders around the world who chose not to intervene in the persecution and murder of Jews and other victims).

Once again, since most teachers of European history rely upon standard textbooks and a chronological approach, teachers may wish to incorporate the Holocaust into the following, standardized units of study in European History: the Aftermath of World War I; the Rise of Dictators; the World at War, 1939-45, and the Consequences of War. Questions which introduce Holocaust studies into these subject areas include:

The Aftermath of World War I:

What role did the Versailles Treaty play in the restructuring of European and world politics?

How did the reconfiguration of Europe following World War I influence German national politics in the period 1919-33?

The Rise of the Dictators:

What factors led to the rise of totalitarian regimes in Europe in the period between the two world wars?

How was anti Semitism used by the Nazis and other regimes (Hungary, Romania, U.S.S.R.) to justify totalitarian measures?

The World at War, 1939-45:

Why has the Holocaust often been called a "war within the war?"

How did the Holocaust affect Nazi military decisions?

Why might it be "easier" to commit genocidal acts during wartime than during a period of relative peace?

The Consequences of War:

What was the connection between World War II and the formation of the State of Israel?

Was a new strain of international morality introduced with the convening of the Nuremberg Tribunals?

How did the Cold War impact the fate of former Nazis?

**Mapping World War II**

\*Where is Germany?

\*How much of Europe was conquered by Hitler?

\*Where was Hitler defeated?

**The Jewish Experiences in World War II**

\*Why did Hitler persecute the Jews?

\*How many Jews died during World War II?

\*How did some Jews survive the war/Holocaust?

**Hitler and His Defeat**

\*How did Hitler come to power?

\*What kind of person was Hitler? Why was he like this?

\*How did Hitler die?

**Freedom**

**Rights & Freedom**

1. Think of the freedom the following rights allow you and your family, and think of the ways you and your family would be affected if these rights were revoked. Remember that if they were revoked, this would mean giving up things you already have. Rank these independently first.

Rank these rights from 1 to 6 --- 1 being MOST important to you.

The right to...

\_\_\_\_\_own or use a public telephone

\_\_\_\_\_date/marry whomever you choose

\_\_\_\_\_own a radio, CD player, Nintendo...

\_\_\_\_\_own a pet

\_\_\_\_\_leave your house whenever you choose (You would still be able to leave the house, but there would be strict limitation on when you could go out.)

2. Discuss your decisions and work to come to a consensus to re-rank the rights as a group. Be ready to share the individual and group responses and support with reasons

8. Use an overhead with time line of what happened to the Jewish people's rights during Hitler's reign (this can be made by teacher).

Students are encouraged to read the following books and then answer questions

**Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl**

**The Hidden Children** by Howard Greenfield

The author weaves the stories of 25 "hidden children" into a haunting portrait of the Holocaust as lived by these young survivors. **Grades 4 and up**

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