

Teaching the Holocaust & Mass Atrocity: Pedagogical Considerations Fostering the Moral Core

Methodological Considerations for Educators (Adapted from the USHMM guidelines)

- ❖ Jews and Judaism or any target group must not always be associated only with victimhood and death.
- ❖ We must accurately define the “Holocaust” and recognize it always a Jewish event ... and always more.
- ❖ We must avoid simple answers (from ourselves or students) to complex history.
- ❖ We cannot let the perpetrators frame the perspective of our study. Students must make careful distinctions about what they are seeing and hearing. We cannot allow the perpetrators to shape the perception of reality or historical memory through their pictures, interpretations, and stereotypes.
- ❖ Recognize the distance beyond self...make room for mourning.
- ❖ We must avoid comparisons of pain. Any person who suffers, suffers the most.
- ❖ We have a dual responsibility to teach the magnitude AND the personal nature of what happened.
- ❖ We must begin with the victims/targets and put people above statistics.
- ❖ We must select appropriate learning activities. We must be aware that we cannot nor should we desire to ‘recreate’ or ‘simulate’ these events in our classrooms.
- ❖ Humanize.
- ❖ We must put this history into its proper contexts: Our first responses to a student’s question must be, “When?” “Where?”
- ❖ We teach moral dilemmas to raise questions of humanity, to teach empathy, and resist easy judgements.
- ❖ We must be wary romanticizing history or emotionally manipulating to engage our students’ interests.
- ❖ We must show the humanity both before and after crimes of mass atrocity to show that target groups are not merely “victims,” but human beings. This will decrease the social and historical distances between ourselves and the people involved.
- ❖ We must strive for a balance in establishing whose perspective informs our study (victims, perpetrators, collaborators, bystanders, away-lookers, rescuers) while recognizing those terms are fluid and reductionist.
- ❖ We must bring our students (and ourselves) in with peace and leave with peace in trauma-informed classrooms that fosters the moral core.
- ❖ We must be sensitive to appropriate written and audio-visual content.
- ❖ We must try to avoid stereotypical and over-generalized descriptions. Be precise with language.
- ❖ We must teach that just because it happened does not mean that it was inevitable. Mass atrocity crimes are a process not an event and therefore preventable.
- ❖ We must take care of ourselves.