

Why Teach the Holocaust

The objective of teaching any subject is to engage the intellectual curiosity of students in order to inspire critical thought and personal growth. Therefore it is essential that educators consider questions of rationale whenever they approach a subject.

The Holocaust provides one of the most effective subjects for an examination of basic moral issues. A structured inquiry into this history yields critical lessons for an investigation of human behavior. Study of the event also addresses one of the central mandates of education in the United States, which is to examine what it means to be a responsible citizen. Through a study of these topics, students come to realize that:

- Democratic institutions and values are not automatically sustained, but need to be appreciated, nurtured, and protected;
- Silence and indifference to the suffering of others, or to the infringement of civil rights in any society can, however unintentionally, perpetuate the problems;
- The Holocaust was not an accident in history, it occurred because individuals, organizations, and governments made choices that not only legalized discrimination but also allowed prejudice, hatred, and ultimately, mass murder, to occur.

WHAT YOUR STUDENTS SHOULD KNOW

It is important to know that a visit to the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center cannot comprehensively cover every event and type of experience surrounding the Holocaust. Therefore, there are some issues we believe would be useful for your students to understand before they come to the museum.

A basic understanding would begin with some familiarity or working knowledge of the chronology of events of the Holocaust, 20th century history and/or World War II. This includes an understanding of the geography of Europe, of the origins of antisemitism, of the chronology of events from the first racial laws of the Nazi regime to the implementation of the Final Solution, as well as a complimentary chronology of racial and antisemitic attitudes in the United States as the war broke out, the inaction of the United States government, and the immigration of survivors to the United States and the Midwest. For educators who wish to provide students a more in-depth investigation of the Holocaust, please contact the museum at 847-967-4840 for further educational resources and services we provide.

WHY STUDENTS SHOULD BE PREPARED

The exhibition presents the experiences of individual Midwest survivors and liberators, enabling students to make connections and to find relevancy. Therefore, the optimal use of a Museum visit is not to teach history per se, but rather to focus students' attention on an exploration of the varied experiences of our survivors and eyewitnesses. The historical narrative (Rise of Nazism, Kristallnacht, ghettoization, The Final Solution and liberation) is more effectively taught in the classroom, preferably prior to a visit to the museum. A visit to

our museum should serve to enhance and reinforce your existing curricula about the Holocaust, and build upon the curricula by exploring the lessons and applicability of the Holocaust, to broader issues or hatred, indifference, and genocide.

Engage with History

Focus Student Learning: Guide to the Karkomi Holocaust Exhibition

Throughout the Karkomi Holocaust Exhibition, students are able to visualize personal history through artifacts, photographs, and testimonies of eyewitnesses. Students will come away with context of the history of the Holocaust, as well as historical themes and topics connecting the lessons of the Holocaust with the present. There are many ways one can utilize the exhibition space to enhance your students' visit.

Students can either think chronologically or thematically analyzing the bigger questions leading to discussion during and post-field trip.

Karkomi Holocaust Exhibition: Key Questions and Themes by Gallery.

Gallery 1: The World Before

Jewish life and community before the war were diverse and rich. Ideological, cultural, political, and regional differences ran deep, but most Jews shared a common heritage, set of values, and traditions. The right walls depict photos of typical family life; while the left walls reflect religious life...

Gallery 2: The Rise of Nazism

After losing World War I, Germany was forced under the Versailles Treaty to give up territory, pay reparations, and reduce its army. Germany suffered an economic and social depression in the late 1920's that set the stage for the rise of Nazism and Hitler's ascent. He promised to help Germany by eliminating its "enemies": Communists, liberals, and Jews.

Key Questions

Gallery 1 and 2: Look at the photographs and artifacts on the walls. What can you find that tells us how the Jewish community lived before the Holocaust?

Gallery 2: After watching the video and viewing the large photographs on the wall, what can you tell us about the environment in Germany following WWI?

How were conditions ideal for someone like Hitler and the Nazi Party to rise to power?

Gallery 3: Life Under the Nazism

In the five years from 1933-1938, over 400 discriminatory laws and decrees against the Jews and other victims of Nazism were passed. On the jagged walls to your right are the first wave of Nazi anti-Jewish laws used laws to isolate Jews, make their lives increasingly unbearable, and convince them to “voluntarily” leave Germany. The curved wall on the left shows the Jewish response bending but refusing to break, while many still believed that life would return “to normal.”

Featured Artifacts: Wall of Passports—October 5, 1938

Jewish passports were invalidated. Jews who needed a passport for emigration purposes were stamped with the red letter “J” (*Jude-Jew*). Additionally, Jews with first names of “non-Jewish” origin had to add “Israel” if male and “Sara” if female, so that they could be easily identified

Gallery 4: *Kristallnacht*: The November Pogroms 1938

For two days, Nazis unleashed an unprecedented assault on the Jewish communities of Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland. These attacks became known as *Kristallnacht*—the “Night of Broken Glass.” With cooperation from the local population, police, and fire brigades, Nazis smashed windows, vandalized storefronts, burned down over 1,000 synagogues, and arrested 30,000 Jewish men and sent them to concentration camps. Panic-stricken, Jews searched for countries of refuge, but many had already closed their borders. Step onto the cracked glass floor and watch the synagogue doors as projections of synagogue interiors and exteriors before and after *Kristallnacht* are shown.

Gallery 5: World’s Response

Newspapers, headlines, and dates are displayed in this area highlighting the coverage of the Nazi violence. *Kristallnacht* convinced Jews of the need to emigrate, but immigration restrictions from many countries, financial roadblocks, and German bureaucracy created obstacles. In 1939, ninety-five percent of Americans disapproved of the German regime, but fewer than 5 percent supported changing the system to allow more refugees into the country.

Gallery 3: Explore the artifacts, and photos on the curved wall to the left. Find examples of how the Jews might have resisted and responded to what was happening during this time. On the jagged wall to the right, find examples of how Nazis excluded Jews from German society?.

What are the types of choices Jews had to make during this time? Why did some Jews leave? Why did others choose to stay?

Gallery 4: Kristallnacht is often identified as a “turning point” in the history of the Holocaust. From what you read and observed in the gallery, what do you see that supports this idea?

Where do you find examples of changing attitudes and treatment toward Jews?

Gallery 5: Explore the gallery and find evidence that the world knew about the environment in Germany?

What examples can you find of the obstacles to both emigration and immigration that Jews faced?

Gallery 6: The World at War

Germany invaded Poland. Two days later, France and Britain declared war on Germany. World War II began. The Nazis conquered neighboring countries with two objectives: *Lebensraum*—living space for the “superior” Aryan population and racial domination of non-Aryans. The video on the wall shows how rapidly the Nazis advanced and occupied Europe. The lower right screen shows the number of Jews living in Nazi-controlled areas.

Gallery 7: Mosaic of Victims

The Nazis targeted a number of diverse groups that they considered racial, biological, political, or social threats or burdens on society. Note the propaganda defining the Aryan race and “perfect” characteristics. The tile wall shows a photo of a “euthanasia” (mercy killing) facility at Hadamar where Nazis murdered their first victims, German people with physical, mental, and cognitive disabilities. This was the first time the Nazis used gas to murder civilians. Note that trained doctors were involved in the killing.

Gallery 8: Nazi Racism Spreads 1939-1941

By occupying Western Europe, the Nazis used both military force and the cooperation of local populations to rapidly implement anti-Jewish laws that had taken years to establish within Germany. Jews throughout Nazi-occupied Europe were forced to wear identification badges in the form of a yellow star to humiliate and isolate them. The badges ultimately made it easier to identify Jews for deportation to camps. Note the yellow Stars of David and look behind the bookcase that replicates the secret entrance where Anne Frank’s family and others hid.

Gallery 9: Ghettos

With the conquest of new territories throughout Europe, millions of Jews and non-Jews came under Nazi control. The Nazis created ghettos to isolate and contain these populations, creating horrific conditions that killed many in these captive communities. This gallery is modeled after the ghettos of Warsaw, Lodz, and Krakow in occupied Poland and highlights the conditions and resistance within the ghettos. Notice the sloping and cobblestone floor as you descend further into the exhibition.

Gallery 6: Watch the video map.

What significant challenge does the occupation of Europe present for the Nazis?

Gallery 7: What non-Jewish victims were targeted during the Holocaust?

How did the Nazis misuse science to justify the killing of people with disabilities?

Gallery 8: Find examples of the measures Nazis took to increase the isolation of the Jewish population in the West.

Where do you see examples of resistance or response Jewish people took to defy Nazi policies?

Gallery 9: What do the artifacts and photographs tell you about the conditions in the ghettos?

What measures did they Nazis take to isolate the Jewish community from the rest of the population?

Explore the gallery. Can you find examples of resistance?

Gallery 10: Movement East: Mass Murder

Germany's invasion of the territories of the Soviet Union added more than five million Jews under Nazi control. The Nazis were no longer satisfied with their policy of ghettoization and implemented a plan that called for the mass murder of all Jews, which became known as "The Final Solution." Three thousand members of the *Einsatzgruppen*, special killing units, often supplemented by local auxiliaries and even ordinary citizens, were sent from town to town to confiscate property, and then systematically murder Jews, Roma, and others in mass shootings.

Gallery 11: Wannsee Conference: **January 20, 1942**

For 90 minutes, fifteen Nazi officials met to ensure the cooperation of various administrative departments in the implementation of the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question." In addition to sending mobile killers to stationary victims, the murders became industrialized, and Jews were brought by railroad cars to stationary killing centers. The chart on the wall shows the number of Jews (11 million total) who were targeted in conquered Nazi countries and in countries slated to be conquered. Folders show the education levels and pre-war professions of the Nazi officials present at this meeting.

Gallery 12: Deception

The Nazis used deception to mask their intentions to the victims and to the public. Deception was a major tool which made it nearly impossible for the victims to imagine that a sophisticated and civilized nation had decided to murder all the Jews of occupied Europe. The glass wall features several different euphemisms used by the Nazis to mask their intentions.

Gallery 13: Deportation & Railcar

This circular area marks the transition between the two buildings of the Museum. Listen to Survivors' personal accounts of deportation and catch your first glimpse of the railcar. This is a typical rail car used during deportations, which might hold between 80 to 100 people for days. You may choose to go inside or walk around. We give our visitors a choice, but remember that the victims did not have one. Please be respectful and quiet while in the railcar.

Gallery 10: Look at the photographs in the gallery. Who do you think is the photographer of the photos on the wall? Why do you think these photos are being taken?

Who do you see in the photos? Look in the foreground. What don't you see?

What is the significance of these photographs?

Gallery 11: Look at the diagram of the attendees, what were their professions before the war? Why is this important to note?

Gallery 12: What language do you see in the gallery to show how the Nazis hid their crimes?

Gallery 13: Watch the videos and view the railcar, what were the conditions like during deportation to the camps?

Gallery 14 & 15:

Explore the gallery and listen to the testimonies of survivors.

Why do you think the Museum chose to display one of each item, e.g.: shoe, bowl, spoon, rather than a large pile of objects?

Gallery 16: Explore the gallery looking at the different forms of resistance. What choices did Jews make to maintain their dignity?

Why were these objects important to the survivors?

What do they represent?

Gallery 17: Read the story of Jan Karski, what did he use to inform the public of the atrocities?

Why did Karski choose not to stand by? Why did the Museum highlight this man?

Gallery 18 & 19: Who were rescuers?

Who were collaborators?

Where and how was rescue carried out?

Gallery 14 & 15: Death Camps

Between 1933 and 1945, more than 40,000 camps and internment sites were established in Nazi-occupied Europe. To facilitate “The Final Solution,” six of the camps were developed with a goal of mass murder. Many of these killing centers used gas chambers and crematoriums, like the model in the middle of this room. Families were separated after arrival, and individuals were selected to work or to die. More than three million Jews and hundreds of thousands of non-Jews were murdered in these killing centers. Look at the display of shoes from the camps, a stark reminder of the millions of people killed during the Holocaust. The brief videos and artifacts here demonstrate how prisoners strived to maintain their humanity despite the desperate conditions.

Gallery 16: Resistance

There were many forms of resistance to Nazi oppression. Jews chose to stand up through spiritual, cultural, and armed resistance. They resisted by following religious traditions, clandestinely creating clothes, keeping objects that were important to them. Others chose armed resistance. Some Jews became partisans fighting against the Nazis. Many of the artifacts in the gallery represent the different choices they made to maintain their dignity.

Gallery 17: Getting the Word Out

Knowing did not mean believing – and believing did not translate into action. A significant psychological shift was required for the world to comprehend the unprecedented scope of the Holocaust. Some chose to take risks and try to inform governments and the public what was happening to the Jews across Europe. Jan Karski risked his life to enter ghettos and camps to see for himself. He traveled to England and the United States to tell them of the atrocities committed against the Jews. The world still did not comprehend the severity of the situation and his words did not translate into action.

Gallery 18 & 19: Rescue/Collaboration

Look at the wall on the right to see how the collaboration of individuals, governments, institutions, and industries supporting

anti-Jewish policy were critical to the implementation of genocidal policies throughout occupied Europe. On the left wall, observe several rescuers, including a diplomat, a business person, and a young teenage girl—the exceptional few throughout occupied Europe who risked their lives to save Jews.

Gallery 20: Death Marches

As Allied armies advanced and Nazi defeat was inevitable, thousands of prisoners were forced to evacuate camps in the East on foot in death marches toward the interior of the German Reich. Thousands died of exhaustion and exposure. Note the map that shows both the pre-war Jewish population and the number of Jews murdered. *The floor ascends as you enter the “Light Side” of the exhibition*

Gallery 21: Liberation

Allied forces who had come to defeat the Nazis, did not expect to liberate prisoners. Battle-weary soldiers could not imagine the horror and sights of the camps. The floor below contains authentic artifacts and replicas of Nazi paraphernalia representing the “stomping out” of Nazi rule. Listen to the testimony of liberated prisoners and their liberators.

Gallery 22: Return to Life

When World War II ended, the Jewish Survivors of the Holocaust were free, but their homes were destroyed and many of their family members and friends had been killed. They chose to look to the future, calling themselves the “Surviving Remnant.”

Gallery 23: Political Aftermath

The United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and France established an international military tribunal that set, for the first time, binding legal criteria for the prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes against peace. Between 1945 and 1949, a series of additional trials took place in Nuremberg to try doctors, judges, business people, and high-level government officials. Many of those found guilty received short prison sentences or no penalty at all. The trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961 in Israel was the first time that Survivors were given a platform to speak. Widely covered in the press, on live radio broadcasts, and international television, the trial helped to establish a worldwide consciousness of the Holocaust.

Key Questions

Gallery 18 & 19: Listen to the testimony of the rescuers and those they saved. Why do you think rescuers did what they did?

Gallery 20: What do you think was the Nazis’ goal(s) in carrying out the death marches?

Gallery 21: What do you think “liberation: meant to the survivors? How do you think they felt?

Listen to the survivor stories. What were the hardships of liberation?

How did the Allies react when liberating the camps?

Gallery 22: Explore the artifacts and photos. What are some of the struggles survivors had after the war?

What was life like in the DP camps?

What choices did they have to rebuild their lives?

Gallery 23: Explore the gallery. Who do you think justice serves? Can justice be possible in the aftermath of atrocity?

How can you achieve justice when only the leaders are convicted of the crimes?

Gallery 24, 25, & 26: Departure and Arrival

The right wall contains artifacts of Jews immigrating to Israel which was British-controlled Palestine at the time. The left wall shows Jews sailing to and arriving in America. Survivors were an integral part of the birth of the State of Israel, and of American culture and experience. View the wall of naturalization certificates of Survivors and pull out the drawers of items from four Survivors' new lives in America.

Gallery 27: Neo-Nazi March on Skokie

"We Are Coming!" proclaimed an American neo-Nazi group that was petitioning to march through Skokie, where nearly half of the population of 70,000 were Jews—7,000 of them Holocaust Survivors and their families. Legal efforts to block the march went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Many Survivors saw this as a wake-up call to tell their stories and fight hatred with education. Here you can see posters from the marches in 1977–78.

Gallery 28: Holocaust Awareness & Survivor Empowerment

After the Holocaust, Survivors initially focused on rebuilding their families and lives and championing Jewish continuity and security for Israel. They spoke little of past horrors. In America, many began to break their silence in the 1970s and led efforts to preserve eyewitness testimonies. See the photo of the world gathering of Survivors at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, Israel in June 1981.

Gallery 29: Pritzker Theatre

The closing film considers the implications of the Holocaust and its legacy as applied to the lessons of contemporary genocide and mass inhumanity. It reflects upon the failed promise of "Never Again" but challenges visitors to think about what they can do to make a difference today and in the future. The key statement, "Now it is up to you."

Gallery 24, 25, and 26: Open up the drawers of items, who stands out to you and why? How did the survivors' lives change?

Gallery 27 & 28: Why did the attempted neo-Nazi march motivate survivors to speak about their experiences?

Why is it important to study the Holocaust today?

Why do survivors share their stories?

Gallery 29: What can lessons can we learn from the Holocaust and contemporary genocides?

What can you do to make a positive change in the world or community?