

Educator Preparation Guide: Teaching the Holocaust in 8th Grade Global Studies

Teaching about the Holocaust is a vital responsibility that calls for both historical precision and emotional sensitivity. As educators lead students through this 8th-grade inquiry design model (IDM) unit, they help young people grapple with complex issues of power, identity, resistance, and human rights. The Holocaust is not only a chapter in history—it is also a warning about what can happen when dehumanization, fear, and hate go unchecked. This guide is designed to help you build confidence and grounding to teach this unit with depth and care.

Why This Unit Matters

- The Holocaust is a uniquely well-documented genocide that shows how a modern, industrialized society can incrementally descend into mass atrocity through laws, propaganda, and policy.
- Minnesota students will connect global history with local perspectives through survivor testimonies and community archives.
- Teaching this content supports students' development as ethical thinkers, civic participants, and historical investigators.
- The unit fosters empathy, critical thinking, and media literacy—key 21st-century skills.

Recommended Resources

- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) | [Fundamentals of Teaching the Holocaust](#)
- USHMM | [Timeline of Events](#)
- Echoes & Reflections | [Pedagogical Principles for Effective Holocaust Instruction](#)
- Facing History and Ourselves | [Prepare to Teach](#)

Framing, Language and Terminology

How we frame Holocaust education—through our language, emphasis, and guiding questions—directly shapes students’ understanding of antisemitism, identity, and genocide. Many students (and educators) bring limited or oversimplified knowledge of the Holocaust and may not fully grasp the diversity of Jewish life or the mechanisms by which hate becomes systemic. This unit is an opportunity to replace flawed narratives with historically grounded, humanizing, and nuanced understandings.

Language

Instead of	Consider	Because
The Jews	Jewish people or Jewish communities	Avoids generalizations and centers humanity and diversity
Jewish religion	Jewish identity or Jewish people	Jewish identity can be religious, cultural, ethnic, or secular
Concentration camps (as a catch-all)	Be specific: labor camps, death camps, transit camps	Clarifies function and intention of different Nazi camp systems
Final Solution (without context)	Nazi plan to murder the Jews of Europe	Avoids euphemisms; reinforces genocidal intent
Others were persecuted too (to minimize Jewish targeting)	Other groups were targeted for persecution, but only Jewish people were targeted for complete annihilation	Provides a clear distinction between groups who were persecuted vs the only group who were specifically targeted for complete annihilation

Common Misconceptions to Disrupt

Misconception	Reframing Guidance
All Jewish people are the same	Emphasize that Jewish identity includes a wide range of cultural, ethnic, and religious experiences across time and geography.
Antisemitism began with Hitler	Provide historical examples of antisemitism in Europe before the 20th century, including laws, myths, and discrimination.

Jewish people went to the camps without resistance	Highlight examples of spiritual, cultural, and armed resistance; resistance was shaped by context, resources, and risk.
Only Jewish people were targeted	Clarify that while other groups were also persecuted, only Jews were targeted for complete annihilation.
Genocide happens suddenly	Help students trace the incremental stages of progression in propaganda, laws, and institutional actions that built towards mass violence over time.

Supporting Question 1: Who are the Jewish people?

Historical and Cultural Context

This question introduces students to the diversity of Jewish life before the Holocaust.

- Jewish communities have existed for thousands of years across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.
- In early 20th-century Europe, Jewish people were an integral part of society, contributing to arts, sciences, education, and business.

Key Concepts for Educators

- Jewish identity includes ethnic, cultural, and religious dimensions.
- Jewish communities were targeted not because of anything they did, but because of who they were and how they were perceived by antisemitic ideology.

Recommended Resources

- University of Minnesota Libraries | [Upper Midwest Jewish Archives](#)
- USHMM | [Introduction to the Holocaust](#)
- Facing History and Ourselves | [Jewish Life before World War II](#) (video, 07:11)

Supporting Question 2: How did Nazi Germany turn citizens, neighbors, and friends into enemies?

Historical and Cultural Context

This section explores how long-standing antisemitism combined with Nazi ideology to dehumanize Jews.

- Antisemitic myths have circulated for centuries across Europe, including conspiracy theories, scapegoating, and dehumanization.
- The Nazis built on these existing beliefs to create a racial ideology that portrayed Jews as a global threat to Germany and Western civilization.

Key Concepts for Educators

- Nazi propaganda embedded antisemitic stories into laws, education, film, and public messaging to justify exclusion and violence.
- These false narratives laid the foundation for widespread public support—or indifference—toward persecution and genocide.

Recommended Resources

- USHMM | [Nazi Propaganda](#)
- USHMM | [Teaching Materials on Antisemitism and Racism](#)
- Facing History | [Rise of the Nazi Party](#)
- Echoes and Reflections | [Antisemitism](#) (video, 14:53)

Supporting Question 3: How did laws, propaganda, and policies gradually change life for Jewish people and other targeted groups in Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1945?

Historical and Cultural Context

This question focuses on the incremental escalation of violence and exclusion in Nazi-led Germany

- Through hundreds of legal measures, the Nazi-led German government gradually excluded Jews from public life, the professions, and public education, eventually stripping them of all rights, including citizenship.
- The goal of Nazi propaganda was to demonize Jews and to create a climate of hostility and indifference toward their plight.
- This was a gradual process of escalation, discrimination, and violence, leading to extermination, and was implemented step-by-step over several years.

Recommended Resources

- USHMM | [Timeline Activity and Laws & Decrees](#)
- JCRC | [Witnesses to the Holocaust Teacher Guide](#)

Supporting Question 4: How have Jewish experiences during the era of the Holocaust been commemorated?

Historical and Cultural Context

This final question invites students to examine memory, responsibility, and the ethics of remembrance.

- In the aftermath of World War II, survivors, communities, and nations created memorials to honor victims and ensure such atrocities are not repeated.
- The scope and style of memorialization vary by country, reflecting national narratives and the role each played in the Holocaust.

Key Concepts for Educators

- Commemoration helps societies confront their past and promote human rights.
- Students explore how memory is shaped, preserved, and sometimes contested.

Recommended Resources

- Facing History and Ourselves | [Why Must We Remember the Holocaust? Because Democracy is Precious](#)