

# Guidelines for delivering Holocaust and genocide education on Holocaust Memorial Day



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Learning from genocide -  
for a better future



## About Holocaust Memorial Day

The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) is the registered charity, funded by the UK Government, that promotes and supports Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) in the UK.

HMD takes place every year on 27 January, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp complex. It is the international day to remember the 6 million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, alongside the millions of people murdered under Nazi persecution of other groups and during more recent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. It is an occasion for everyone to come together to learn, remember, reflect and consider what action we can take to stand up to hatred, discrimination and racism in the world today.

HMD has a theme each year. To learn more about this year's theme, visit [hmd.org.uk/theme](https://hmd.org.uk/theme).

## Education resources

[hmd.org.uk/schools](https://hmd.org.uk/schools)

We believe all students have a right to access Holocaust and genocide education that is appropriate to them. We provide support and resources for educators to mark HMD with their students. All resources include historical information about the Holocaust and genocide and testimony by those who were affected. Some of the resources also highlight the contemporary relevance of learning about hatred and discrimination and taking action for a safer future. We encourage schools to take a cross-curricular approach and think creatively about marking HMD.

Our resources focus on putting survivors and victims at the heart of genocide education. Students are learning about the people behind the statistics, which restores their identity back to those whom the perpetrators tried to dehumanise.

We also try to ensure that young people understand the processes that can lead to genocide. This enables them to think about how genocide can be stopped in the future.

Our education resources are suitable for students of different ages between 7 and 18. We have some resources on our website specifically designed for students with SEND/ASN ([hmd.org.uk/SEND](https://hmd.org.uk/SEND)). We recommend including as many students as you can in your school's HMD commemorations because HMD is for everybody.

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## Our guidelines

This document provides guidance as a starting point for teaching about the Holocaust, Nazi persecution of other groups and more recent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. These guidelines have been developed in consultation with teachers, survivors and Holocaust and genocide education specialists.

Marking HMD on or around 27 January can provide an additional opportunity to learn about and reflect on hate, discrimination and prejudice and to take action for a safer future. This learning can be cross-curricular, based in a range of subjects and complement the history curriculum on the Holocaust. This guidance supports you delivering Holocaust and genocide education in different contexts and signposts to further guidance and different resources.

## Teaching challenges

Many teachers struggle with lack of time and lack of confidence in their own subject knowledge of the Holocaust, Nazi persecution of other groups and more recent genocides.

Our resources aim to support teachers with varying levels of experience in teaching these topics. The resources include detailed lesson plans, assemblies, activities and projects that provide everything that is needed for an engaging and interactive session. Background information sheets are available to help teachers answer students' questions.

Our Outreach Officer (Education and Youth) is available to answer questions, discuss plans and can be contacted on [education@hmd.org.uk](mailto:education@hmd.org.uk).

**Holocaust education recommendations are also available from:**

- **The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)**
- **Yad Vashem - The World Holocaust Remembrance Center**
- **The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**
- **The Holocaust Educational Trust**

## General guidelines

The Holocaust and genocide can be a complex and daunting subject to teach. It may evoke a range of emotional responses from students and teachers. To ensure that teachers involved in HMD activities are comfortable in their role, you could hold a staff meeting in advance to talk through these guidelines and to agree on the approach you will take in teaching this difficult topic. We recommend that you contact parents in advance to make them aware that students may come home wishing to talk about what they have learned.

Some of our resources explore the Holocaust and other genocides together. We believe that being able to identify resonances in the way in which genocides occur across different contexts helps students to recognise warning signs that support prevention. We are careful to guide students to look at historical events side by side but without unhelpful comparisons of equivalence.

Our resources offer ideas and suggestions for learning materials and activities. You know your students best and can work with our resources in a way that suits your students. Please consider these questions:

- What are the potential challenges with this subject for your class?
- Is there someone in the class who has had experiences of discrimination, comes from a marginalised background or is a refugee, or who has family members who have these experiences? If so, they may need additional support.
- What do my students know about the topic now? What will they need to know to be able to process new information they receive in planned commemoration and learning activities?
- How do we support students' reflection on their learning?

### **Do not use graphic images to shock students**

Graphic images may distress or traumatise some students. Research suggests that seeing violent images can shut down our comprehension and make it difficult for us to absorb information<sup>1</sup>. For this reason, we suggest avoiding graphic images. Please see the section on use of images below for more detailed notes.

### **Do not ask students to imagine themselves in the shoes of victims or perpetrators**

Activities that place students in an immersive situation, asking them to imagine what it would be like to walk along train tracks, into a cramped train carriage, to squeeze into a hiding space are not an appropriate way to teach the Holocaust. We cannot recreate the environment and conditions in which the victims found themselves, and we should not want to put our students in that environment. Additionally, this approach tends to teach about a brief moment, which does not enable students to understand the processes behind the genocide and their complexity. Instead of asking students to imagine themselves into the past events, we can encourage students to consider and reflect how the victims might have felt in various different moments.

### **Avoid simple answers to complex questions**

Be open with your students about the fact that the Holocaust and genocide raise difficult and complex questions about human behaviour and that different people have different opinions, even about things such as the definition of 'the Holocaust'. However, make it clear that the facts of the Holocaust and other genocides are not open to differing views.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Fiorenza Loiacono

## Use of images

Our resources often come with PowerPoint presentations that include images we consider to be suitable. We also provide **collections of images** for you to use. If you are making your own resources, we encourage you to read through the following guidance when deciding which images to use:

- Consider why you are using images. Know what you want the images to achieve and never use them for shock value alone.
- Avoid unnecessary, repeated or inappropriate images of dead bodies or open mass graves.
- Avoid using images of people impacted by the Holocaust or genocide which dehumanise individuals.
- Do not use images which glamorise the Nazis. Particularly avoid images of Nazi flags, uniforms, salutes etc. Ensure that any images are used in the context of highlighting the consequences of Nazi policy.
- If you have a speaker, particularly a Holocaust or genocide survivor, discuss with them the images that you are considering using. Try to avoid images that your speaker may find distressing.
- Please pay close attention to the captions for each photograph – it's important that you tell the whole story behind an image when using it.
- Some photographs you find may have been taken by the Nazis themselves – share this context with your students and discuss their reasons for taking the photograph. How does it compare with photographs by targeted groups, or pictures taken secretly to document Nazi crimes?
- Please do not edit or crop the images we provide and you must supply copyright information as requested.

If you would like more advice about the suitability of a particular image for your HMD activity please email to us at [education@hmd.org.uk](mailto:education@hmd.org.uk).

## Use of language

There are often concerns about the 'right' language to use. Please be aware that some language that was considered acceptable historically is now considered offensive. The advice below considers some common sensitivities and aims to help you feel more confident in the language you are using. Our **Teacher information sheets** will give you more information about each genocide marked on HMD.

### Genocide:

We use the **legal definition of genocide** ratified in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide on 9 December 1948. This helps people to understand what genocide is and which historical events have been defined that way.

### The Holocaust:

- There are differing definitions of the word 'Holocaust'. We define it as the attempt by the Nazis and their collaborators to murder all the Jews in Europe.
- Some students may say 'the Germans committed these crimes'. However, be precise and clear that it was not all German people. The Nazis and their collaborators, including people from other countries, were responsible.
- In Poland, legislation has been recently brought in to avoid the use of the term 'Polish concentration camps'. Describing the camps as above makes it sound like these were run by the Polish government. These camps were run by the Nazis in Nazi-occupied Poland with the support of some local Polish people and other collaborators and supporters.

## Nazi persecution of other groups

- The Nazis and their collaborators persecuted a number of different groups. You can read about **Nazi persecution of other groups** on our website.
- Roma and Sinti people were one of the groups targeted by the Nazis in what we now call 'the Roma genocide'. Historically these groups have been referred to as 'Gypsies'. Because this word has also been used as a slur, some members of the community find the word offensive. 'Roma' and 'Sinti' are the correct terms.
- Another group persecuted by the Nazis was homosexual men.
- While we nowadays recognise different identities in the LGBTQI+ community, many of these terms did not exist or have the same meaning during the Nazi rule. There was a specific campaign by the Nazis and their collaborators against gay men, and we know of discrimination and persecution of individuals who had other LGBTQI+ identities.
- Mentally and physically disabled people were murdered by the Nazis through the 'T4 programme', but more groups of people may have been persecuted than your students realise. From 1933 people were forcibly sterilised for 'hereditary diseases' including epilepsy and alcoholism.

## The genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda:

Many survivors find the term 'the Rwandan genocide' offensive because it has been appropriated by genocide denialists. In 2014 the UN accepted a proposal from the Rwandan Government that the official wording should be 'the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda'. While the Tutsi were the target group of the genocide, Hutu extremists also killed Hutu who opposed the genocide and Twa people. We use the wording 'the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda' to recognise the trajectory of anti-Tutsi violence leading up to 1994.

## The genocide in Bosnia:

In Bosnia, a genocide was committed against Bosniaks and Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica during the Bosnian War, which was one of the Yugoslav Wars that resulted in the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The Bosnian War saw many mass atrocities, including the use of concentration camps. There are three larger groups of people in Bosnia: Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs. This last group has close ties to Serbia and wanted to form an independent Serb state within Bosnia. Neighbouring Serbia and Croatia were involved in the Bosnian War and people from these countries are often referred to as Serbs and Croats respectively. Please be careful to maintain distinction, for example, between 'Serb troops' and 'Bosnian Serb troops' when discussing this topic.

## How much time will it take?

Your school can mark HMD in different ways, depending on time and resources available. Our assemblies include a script and presentation, which can be delivered as provided, or you can use them as a starting point for your students' own work. Our tutor time activities are designed to fit into a 20-minute session. Each one can be delivered as a stand-alone session, or you can do a series. Our lesson plans usually fit within one lesson, although some have options for a double lesson, or to extend into a longer scheme of work. Our creative activity resources can be adapted to different time frames.

You will need some planning time to familiarise yourself with our resources, decide how you want to mark HMD and seek the support of your senior leadership team. You may want to schedule a meeting with other teachers across different departments, form groups or year groups to get them involved in delivering a series of learning activities.

## Dealing with difficult questions

Our resources provide everything you will need to mark HMD at your school, including **background information sheets** on each genocide. While these sheets are designed to provide key information and help you answer students' questions, exploring the Holocaust and genocide with your students can lead to interesting and surprising discussions, to which you may not know the answers. Do not be afraid to admit that you don't know something. You can always find out together and return to a question later.

Holocaust and genocide denial and distortion are on the rise, and students may have been exposed to some of these views, particularly, online. Holocaust denial is a form of antisemitism (anti-Jewish hatred). A part of your session may need to include dismantling misinformation. Discussing reliable and unreliable sources of information may help your students to navigate what they are reading online. You can also explore our **10 stages of genocide poster** which highlights that genocide is a process and denial is always its last stage. Our resources on **tackling denial and distortion in the classroom** are available on our website. You may also benefit from our **antisemitism and discrimination lesson plan**.

Your students may have questions about current conflicts and contemporary issues. If these questions raise complex issues, they may end up taking up all the time in a lesson, meaning your students miss out on their Holocaust and genocide education. In this case, we recommend you return the class focus on the topic at hand and schedule a separate session to explore the other questions. In the case of Israel and Palestine, the charity **Solutions Not Sides** can help you deliver a session on the conflict in the Middle East.

## Contemporary relevance

HMD is an opportunity to commemorate and learn about those situations that are defined as genocide. Discussing issues of prejudice, discrimination, hate, division and denial in our society is an important part of marking HMD.

In this context, your discussions may lead towards other conflicts around the world or groups that your students have heard about on the news who are being persecuted because of their identity. Exploring the **10 stages of genocide** is a good way to discuss other atrocities. For example, you may ask whether the target groups are at risk of genocide or if we need to raise awareness of this situation in our community or with our MP. We recommend you structure a learning session clearly so that learning about a genocide is a starting point and contemporary issues are discussed as a related but a different topic that allows students to connect their learning to the world that surrounds them.

Not all problems in our society are relevant to connect to Nazi Germany. We suggest focusing on issues of people being discriminated against or persecuted because of their identity, including in conflicts around the world, and issues related to refugees. For example, problems such as littering or knife crime are outside the scope of HMD.

Be aware that many contemporary issues are highly political and contested. Don't forget you may have students whose family members come from the countries under discussion. Strive to give your students reliable facts and encourage them to consider their biases to ground your discussion.

Even though discussing the Holocaust and more recent genocides and making connections to contemporary issues is challenging and requires sensitivity and care, it is important to do so to show students the relevancy of what they have learnt about the past and to support them in taking action as a result.

## Use of life stories

Learning about the experiences of those affected by the Holocaust and genocides has an important role to play in teaching about the Holocaust and more recent genocides. Our education materials include written or filmed life stories which share experiences of survivors, victims who were murdered, bystanders, rescuers, resisters, witnesses and perpetrators. Hearing about the individual experiences helps students to learn about the history and empathise with those affected. Explore our life stories at [hmd.org.uk/lifestories](http://hmd.org.uk/lifestories).

We recommend you consider carefully what historical or contextual knowledge students need to understand life stories. Having background knowledge will help students to understand the testimony and provides them tools to process what they hear.

### Sokphal Din

Forced out of his home by the Khmer Rouge on 17 April 1975, Sokphal endured hard labour in the Killing Fields and eventually survived the Genocide in Cambodia by escaping to Thai refugee camps where he lived for seven years.



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'We knew that we'd never go back. We knew this is a lie. They just want to kill us. And we knew that we'd never see our father again. We kept hoping, but we knew that it's impossible.'

While we encourage students to build empathy towards the individuals they are learning about, we need to consider the emotional impact that learning about the Holocaust or genocide can have on students. It is valuable for people to feel, for example, sad, angered or moved by testimony. On HMD we want to acknowledge those emotional reactions and mobilise them into a motivation to take action. However, we need to ensure students do not feel triggered or traumatised or over-empathise with the individual to the extent that they imagine the pain for themselves. It is helpful to encourage students to focus on what it was like for the individual, rather than on their own emotional response. For example, 'I imagine that she felt afraid and confused'.

Survivor testimony is shared in many forms. Students can listen to oral testimony by a survivor if they visit in person, read a written text or watch a video or film. Published texts and films are edited, often by a third party who may have their own agenda, and this may have an impact on what parts of the experience are included or excluded. It may be helpful to draw students' attention to this.

Survivor testimony also relies on memory, which can be affected by trauma and time. There may be differences or discrepancies between a historical account and a survivor's memories. Please discuss these particular characteristics of a first-person source with your students.

An individual's testimony only tells us about their memories of what they experienced and saw. The memories may not include details of wider context or perpetrator ideology. There are also many different kinds of experience within any genocide, and it may be helpful to look at more than one person's testimony to understand the range of ways in which people were affected.

Life stories and resources on our website focus on the testimony of survivors, those murdered, rescuers, resisters and witnesses to genocide. Perpetrator testimony is available elsewhere and may be a useful addition to your genocide education when considering the decisions made by different people. If you choose to explore this perspective, it is important to prepare students:

- Discuss the context and motivation behind perpetrators' testimony. Was it part of a legal trial? Are they telling the truth?
- Contextualise perpetrators' views. They may be expressing racist, violent or discriminatory views in their testimony.

While we do not organise survivor speaker visits, our website directs you to contact other relevant organisations. If you would like to try and invite a survivor speaker, please visit:

[www.hmd.org.uk/speakers](http://www.hmd.org.uk/speakers).

## Use of fiction

Some teachers choose to use a fictional film or book as part of their teaching about the Holocaust and genocides. This can help design a cross-curricular approach and connect learning in different subjects, such as History, English, Geography and Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education. There are benefits in using fiction in the Holocaust and genocide education, but you need to be cautious and aware of the dangers of using fiction to teach real historical events.

### Benefits:

Through imaginative connection with the characters, students can gain an understanding of emotional and social experience of some aspects of genocide.

Engaging with fiction allows students to pause and reflect on individuals' experiences of historical events.

### Points of danger:

While some fictional narratives are well-researched and largely historically accurate, others are not. Using less rigorously contextualised fiction in teaching can lead to misconceptions.

Historical events in fiction are depicted in a way that best serves the story. Because of this, a work of fiction may only include some events or components of events from a particular perspective. These may be presented as part of an imagined scenario or other content. You need to be careful about what you ask students to learn from fiction.

If you choose to use fiction in teaching the Holocaust or more recent genocides, we recommend that:

- Students have a lesson on the relevant historical context in advance to equip them to engage with the story and the complex relationship between history and fiction in it.
- Learning programme includes discussion about fictionalisation. What has the author invented and to what end? What is the impact of fictionalisation?

You can find lists of [recommended books](#) on our website.

We recommend that you do not use John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* in teaching the Holocaust. This popular fiction book can lead to misconceptions.

## Creative subjects

Art, Drama, Music and Dance teachers can design activities that allow students to mark HMD creatively. The arts provide an opportunity for students to actively engage with historical information and testimony and to process the emotional impact of these stories. Students' artistic outputs can help communicate what they have learnt to parents, other students and members of the wider community through exhibitions and events.

The creative process can support generative learning and facilitate a learning journey that enhances students' understanding of the Holocaust and more recent genocides. The process of creation itself can be beneficial to students and create space for reflection. This can motivate students to take social action for a safer future.

However, a creative response requires a careful grounding in historical knowledge, a structured process and time. Ensure students have taken part in lessons and research in advance to understand the event that they are responding to. You may want to limit the scope of their exploration. Students could, for example, respond to one individual's testimony or information about a particular event or a place in which genocide took place.

You should be aware of avoiding:

- Oversimplification
- Use of stereotypes
- Representation of traumatic scenes

Before your students create artwork, please consider:

- What will students learn from the creative process?
- Could students' interpretation cause offense to someone?
- How would a survivor feel if they viewed this work?

Our resources can help you use the creative process as a part of teaching the Holocaust and more recent genocides:

- **[Extra]Ordinary Portraits**
- **Drama Lesson**
- **Poetry Writing Lesson**
- **Rwandan Dance Tutorial**
- **Memorial Flames activity**
- **Inclusive Craft Activities**
- **Song sheets**

If you wish to present students' work and share it with the wider community, please discuss with other staff members:

- What will the audience learn from this work?
- What information do we need to present together with the artwork to contextualise it for the audience?



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## Primary school specific notes

While HMD is for everyone, younger students may have different levels of readiness to engage with difficult topics. Please be sensitive to this when planning how you will mark HMD with your students.

We recommend using our **primary school resources** for students aged 7–11. These include assemblies, lesson plans and activities that introduce students to different topics related to marking HMD in an age-appropriate way. The resources feature easy-to-read versions of life stories available on our website.



Our resources take different approaches to marking HMD with younger students:

- Primary Lesson on Memory and Remembering explores what and why we remember and only mentions the Holocaust in the plenary. This lesson is suitable for younger students and teachers can easily adapt it depending on students' readiness.
- Primary *Kindertransport* Lesson Plan allows students to learn about rescue stories and arriving to the UK through Renie Inow's experiences of the *Kindertransport*.
- Primary Assembly introduces the Holocaust briefly and simply without much detail and includes experiences of children and a poem written by a young person.
- Our creative activity ideas and easy-to-read life stories offer resources, based on which you can design activities that are suitable for your students.

## SEND/ASN specific notes

We believe that all students have a right to access Holocaust and genocide education in a way that is appropriate for them. For students with special educational needs, there is a range of ways to make HMD and genocide education accessible.

Our resources often include differentiated options for key activities, enabling teachers to pitch the lesson to their students' strengths. These adapted activities may be suitable for SEND/ASN-specific settings or groups in mainstream education where you have some SEND/ASN students in your class.

We also provide a selection of resources that are specifically designed for students with more profound requirements to mark HMD through sensory experiences and inclusive arts activities: [hmd.org.uk/SEND](http://hmd.org.uk/SEND).

Students who struggle with understanding the needs and views of others, such as some of those with autism spectrum disorder, have benefitted from marking HMD. Teachers have told us that an HMD project in which students studied life stories and responded to them through a writing exercise allowed some students to build skills of empathy and communication.



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Thank you for taking the time to think about how you teach the Holocaust and more recent genocides before marking HMD with your students.

If you have any questions, feedback, or would like to discuss your plans for HMD, please contact our Outreach Officer (Education and Youth) on [education@hmd.org.uk](mailto:education@hmd.org.uk).

Please let us know about your school's HMD activities. You can share your HMD with us via email, tagging up on social media, or through our website: [hmd.org.uk/letusknow](https://hmd.org.uk/letusknow).

Find out more...

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust: [hmd.org.uk](https://hmd.org.uk)  
Discover resources for educators and other materials for  
your activities: [hmd.org.uk/resources](https://hmd.org.uk/resources)