

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



HOLOCAUST  
MEMORIAL  
DAY TRUST



## About HMDT and HMD

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) encourages remembrance in a world scarred by genocide. We promote and support Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) – the international day on 27 January to remember the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, and the millions of people killed under Nazi Persecution and in genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

27 January marks the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp.

## Education resources

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

We provide support and resources for educators to mark Holocaust Memorial Day with their students. All resources include **historical information** about the Holocaust and genocides, the **testimony** of those affected, and highlight the **contemporary relevance** of learning about prejudice and taking action today. We encourage schools to take a cross-curricular approach, and think creatively about HMD.

All of our resources focus on putting survivors and victims at the heart of HMD, ensuring that students are learning about the people behind the statistics, and restoring their identity back to those whom the perpetrators tried to dehumanise. We also try and ensure that people understand the ways a genocide was able to happen, so we can think about how genocide can be stopped in the future.

## Teaching challenges

The most common challenges teachers face in delivering this material are a lack of time, and a lack of confidence in their own knowledge of the subject. Our resources aim to support teachers with varying levels of experience of teaching about these topics, through detailed lesson plans, assemblies, activities and projects that provide everything they will need.

**Background information sheets** are available to help teachers answer student questions. We aim to instil confidence in teachers to take the lead on engaging and motivating sessions. HMDT's Education Officer is available to answer questions and discuss plans, and can be contacted on [education@hmd.org.uk](mailto:education@hmd.org.uk)

## Our guidelines

This document provides a starting point for teachers, and provides guidance for teaching this subject. These guidelines have been developed in consultation with teachers, survivors and Holocaust and genocide education specialists.

As Holocaust Memorial Day falls in January this can be used as an additional time in the year to learn about the Holocaust and genocide. This could be alongside the History curriculum, with a broad range of teachers delivering content. These guidelines and the HMDT education resources aim to ensure that the learning on HMD is meaningful, and supports what students study through the History curriculum. For more guidance on Holocaust education, please see the other signposted resources.

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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 can be a complex and daunting subject to teach and may distress students unless handled sensitively. In order to ensure teachers are suitably supported, you could **hold a staff meeting** in advance to talk through these guidelines and agree on the approach that all teachers will take to the subject. We recommend that you **contact parents in advance** so they are aware that the topic is being covered, and students may come home wishing to talk about what they have learned.

Our resources may explore the Holocaust and other genocides together. We are careful to guide students to look at the events side by side, and avoid unhelpful comparisons.

HMDT believes that **all students have a right to access Holocaust and genocide education**, in a way that is appropriate for them. We therefore provide resources that are suitable for different ages from Key Stage 2 (or equivalent), and differentiate the provided activities for mixed ability groups. We have some resources on our website specifically designed for students with more profound SEN requirements ([hmd.org.uk/SEN](https://www.hmd.org.uk/SEN)). We recommend including as many students as you can in your school's HMD commemorations, to create a school-wide conversation. HMD is for everybody.

You know your students best - Please consider before teaching this topic: what are the potential challenges with this subject for your class? Is there someone in the class who has had similar experiences, or who has family members who have? If so they may need additional support.

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

Research suggests that our brain reacts to violent images in way that can shut down comprehension - making it difficult for the individual to absorb information as it processes the image<sup>1</sup>. For this reason, as well as not wanting to traumatise students, we suggest avoiding graphic images. Please see the section below for more detailed notes.

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

We often hear of events that place students in an immersive situation, asking them to walk along train tracks, into a cramped train carriage, to squeeze into a hiding space and so on. This is not an appropriate way to teach the Holocaust: we can never truly recreate the environment and conditions that the victims found themselves in, and we should not want to put our students in that environment. Additionally, this approach does not enable students to understand the processes behind the genocide, nor the complexities involved.

### **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 are not open to differing views – 6 million Jews were murdered, gas chambers were built and used.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Fiorenza Loiacono

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## **Use of images**

Our resources often come with PowerPoint presentations that include images we consider to be suitable. We also provide collections of images that people can use on the [HMD website](#). 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 Holocaust or genocide victims 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'd like more advice about the suitability of a particular image for your HMD activity then please email [education@hmd.org.uk](mailto:education@hmd.org.uk).

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## 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 should help teachers to feel confident in the language they are using. These are not all of the linguistic questions, but they cover some common sensitivities. Our **Teacher information sheets** will give you more information about each genocide marked on HMD.

### Genocide:

HMDT uses the legal definition of genocide, which you can [read here](#). This helps people to understand what genocide is, and which historical events are legally defined that way.

### The Holocaust:

1. There are differing definitions of the word 'Holocaust'. At HMDT, we define it as the attempt by the Nazis and their collaborators to murder all the Jews in Europe. Have a conversation in advance to ensure all teachers are using the same definitions.
2. Look out for your students saying 'The Germans committed these crimes'. It wasn't all German people, it was the Nazis and their collaborators, including people from other countries.
3. 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.

### The Genocide in Rwanda:

Some survivors find the term 'the Rwandan genocide' offensive. In 2014 the UN accepted a proposal from the Rwandan Government that the official wording should be 'the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda'. This wording change was not without reservations – whilst the Tutsis were the target group of the genocide, and the overwhelming majority of murders were of Tutsi people, non-Tutsis were also killed.

HMDT uses the wording 'the Genocide in Rwanda'.

### Nazi Persecution

1. Roma and Sinti people were one of the groups targeted, persecuted and murdered by the Nazis. Historically this group have been referred to as 'Gypsies'. This word has also been used as a slur in the past, so some members of the community find the word offensive. 'Roma' and 'Sinti' are the correct terms.
2. Another group persecuted by the Nazis was homosexual men. Nowadays language around this group exists that we didn't have before, and we are more likely to refer to the LGBTQ community. There was a specific campaign by the Nazis against gay men, although that doesn't mean other members of this community didn't suffer at their hands.
3. Severely 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 in Bosnia:

In Bosnia, a genocide was committed against Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica, during a war taking place across the country. The war included many other mass atrocities, including the use of concentration camps. The conflict is often referred to as a 'civil war' – although this is incorrect, due to the targeted persecution of Muslim people, and the involvement of Serbia and Croatia, which makes it an international war. Bosnia and Serbia are neighbouring countries. Serbian troops are often referred to as 'Serbs'. There is also a group known as 'the Bosnian Serbs', who are Bosnians with close cultural ties to Serbia, who wanted to form a Serbian state within Bosnia.

## How much time will it take?

Marking HMD can easily be built into your school routine. **Assemblies** are provided that include a script and presentation, which can be delivered as provided, or added to with your student's 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.

However, you will need some **planning time** to familiarise yourself with our resources, and the support of your senior leadership team. You may want to schedule a meeting with other teachers to get them involved too, across different departments, form groups or year groups.

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## Dealing with difficult questions

Our resources provide teachers with everything you will need to lead the session, including **background information sheets** on each genocide that teachers can have on hand to help answer historical questions. However, exploring these topics can lead to interesting and far reaching discussions, and we can never entirely predict the questions you may get.

Holocaust and genocide denial are on the rise, and students may have been exposed to some of these views online. This may mean that part of your session will include dismantling this misinformation. Discussing reliable and unreliable sources of information may help your students to navigate what they are reading online. You can also look at our **10 stages of genocide poster** as a class – genocide is a process and denial is always the last stage.

Holocaust denial is a form of antisemitism (anti-Jewish racism), which has been a persistent form of prejudice for thousands of years. Recorded instances of antisemitism have increased in the UK in recent years, and HMD is an opportunity to educate your students about different forms of prejudice and hatred and how to recognise them. Our **lesson plan** made in partnership with **Stand Up! Education Against Discrimination** may be of interest.

If your students have questions about the current conflict between Israel and Palestine, we recommend you schedule a separate session to explore this. The Middle-Eastern conflict is not relevant to HMD, which focuses on the Holocaust and genocide. It is also so complicated that it can end up taking up all the time in a lesson, meaning your students miss out on their Holocaust and genocide education. If you would like to deliver a session on this conflict, the charity **Solutions Not Sides** can help with this.

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## Contemporary relevance

HMD is an opportunity to learn about the past, consider the impact on the people affected, and think about our **social responsibility** today. Discussing issues of prejudice, hate, division and denial in our society is an important part of HMD.

However, it is not always appropriate to compare current problems in society to Nazi Germany. We suggest focusing on issues of people being targeted because of their identity, conflicts around the world and issues related to refugees. For example, problems such as littering,



playground bullying, knife crime and the environment are not appropriate situations to compare with genocide.

HMD is an opportunity to commemorate and learn about those situations that are defined as genocide. However, 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 – are the target groups at risk of genocide? Do we need to raise awareness of this in our community or with our MP? By learning about the past, we know people can be motivated to take action for a safer future.

Be aware of giving your students the facts without bias on current conflicts – these issues can be highly political. Don't forget you may have students with family members from the countries under discussion.

It is also helpful to make these contemporary connections apparent to your students – there is a reason for us to learn about this history and hear these stories. It is important to learn and share this knowledge, and take action as a result.

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## Use of life stories

Learning about the experiences of those affected by the Holocaust and genocides – both those murdered and those who survived, has an important role to play in teaching about these subjects. HMDT education materials include written or filmed life stories. Hearing about the experiences of individuals 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 teaching the **historical context** first, then engaging with individual experiences. Knowing the context will help students to understand the testimony, and hearing a real person's story will illuminate the history and help them to connect with it.

### 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.'

Whilst we encourage students to build empathy towards the individuals they are learning about, we need to consider the **emotional impact** this topic can have. It is valid and 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 want to avoid students feeling triggered or traumatised through this learning, or over-empathising 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 can be found in many forms – most commonly written, filmed or in-person. The choice of **medium** has an impact on the information given – for example films are edited, often by a third party who may have their own agenda in terms of what parts of the story are kept. It may be helpful to draw students' attention to this.

Survivor testimony relies on **memory**, which can be affected both by trauma and by time. While we would never suggest that testimonies are inaccurate, your students may want to bear in mind the particularities of a first-person source. There may be discrepancies between a historical account and a survivor's memories for example.

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

HMDT resources focus on the testimony of survivors, those murdered, rescuers, resisters and witnesses to genocide. However, **perpetrator testimony** is also available elsewhere and may be a useful addition to your genocide education when considering the decisions made by different people. If you do choose to explore this, it is important to prepare students:

- Discuss the context and motivation behind them giving testimony - It may be part of a legal trial. Are they telling the truth?
- Prepare students that perpetrators may be expressing racist, violent or discriminatory views.

If you would like to try and book a survivor speaker to visit your school, please visit [www.hmd.org.uk/speakers](http://www.hmd.org.uk/speakers).

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## Use of fiction

Some teachers choose to study a fictional film or book as part of their teaching about the Holocaust and genocides. This can be particularly popular when a cross-curricular approach is taken, for example History, English and Citizenship teachers working together. There are positive and negative impacts of the use of fiction to teach real historical events, so these need to be considered in your planning:

**Positive** – By using story-telling, fiction often engages students' imaginations, and helps them to connect to the history in a different way. They can learn historical facts through the story, if it has been well-researched.

**Negative** – Some fiction is not very rigorously researched from a historical point of view. A story may be set at a time in history, but if this research is not present in the book, the fictionalisation of this event can lead to misconceptions and misunderstandings. An example of a popular fiction book that can lead to misconceptions is *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne. We strongly recommend that you do not use this book.

As a result, some teachers choose not to use fiction at all – instead focusing on historical accounts and testimony. There are many that are suitable for children and young people, you can explore our **life stories** and **easy to read life stories** online. If you would like to use fiction, we recommend that you:

- Have a lesson on the historical context in advance, so students can critically engage with the story.
- Discuss the fictionalisation with students – what has the author invented or changed, for what reason, and what is the impact?
- You could compare the fictional story with a piece of first-person testimony.

You can find lists of recommended **books** on our website.

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## Creative subjects

Art, Drama, Music and Dance teachers can all engage with HMD creatively with their students. The arts provide an opportunity for students to engage with historical information and testimony in a different way, and process the emotional impact of these stories. Their artistic outputs can also help to communicate what they have learnt to parents, other students and members of the community through exhibitions and events.

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust has a variety of resources that can help you teach the Holocaust in a safe setting, such as a **Drama lesson** that features activities pioneered by Bertolt Brecht. These help the audience to learn facts about what happened, and protect performers from trying to re-enact traumatic situations, yet still provide an interactive element. You can also look at our **Rwandan Dance Tutorial**, **Song sheets**, and **Recipe cards**.

However, a creative response requires a **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 – they could respond to one individual’s testimony for example, or information about a particular event or place in which genocide took place.

You should be aware of avoiding:

- Oversimplification
- Use of stereotypes
- Representation of traumatic scenes

The **creative process** is a learning journey for students, and should enhance their understanding of the Holocaust and genocides. The output should be a secondary consideration – even if the work produced is not shared more widely, the process is beneficial to the students.

If you do wish to present their work, think about the impact of the artistic output on the audience before presenting – for example:

- Could this interpretation cause offense?
- How would a survivor feel if they viewed this work?
- What will the audience learn from viewing the work?
- What information needs to be provided with the artwork to contextualise it for the audience?



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## Primary school specific notes

We recommend using our primary school resources with Key Stage 2 students (or equivalent). These include assemblies, lesson plans and activities that introduce students to the topic in an age-appropriate way, and feature easy-to-read versions of our life stories.

Age-appropriate resources are created by focusing on:

- The experiences of children during the Holocaust and genocide
- Rescue stories, such as the *Kindertransport*
- Themes such as home, equality and difference
- Creative activities that use reading, writing and comprehension activities, and responding to what students have learnt through displays, art and presentations



You may find it helpful to think about the schemes of work leading into and following HMD, to set the day in context. For example, if students are doing a geography project, learning the stories of people from different countries on HMD can feed into this wider work.

If you would like to mark the day through a whole school approach and include the younger years, we recommend focusing with them on the issues of 'difference' and 'equality' – not introducing the topic of genocide, and involving them in a whole school artistic display. We have a range of creative ideas for school groups and others to mark HMD available through the **resources section** of our website.

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## SEN specific notes

HMDT believes 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 Holocaust Memorial Day and genocide education accessible.

Our resources include two or three differentiated options for key activities, enabling teachers to pitch the lesson to their students' abilities. This is particularly helpful for mixed-ability groups in mainstream education, but also make our general resources suitable for some SEN-specific settings.

HMDT also provides a selection of resources that are specifically designed for students with more profound requirements to mark the day through sensory experiences and inclusive arts activities: [hmd.org.uk/SEN](http://hmd.org.uk/SEN)

HMDT has received feedback from those who teach students who struggle with understanding the needs and views of others (such as those with autism spectrum disorder). Many say that studying our life stories and working with students to write their own responses has been a very helpful project for some in building skills of empathy and communication.

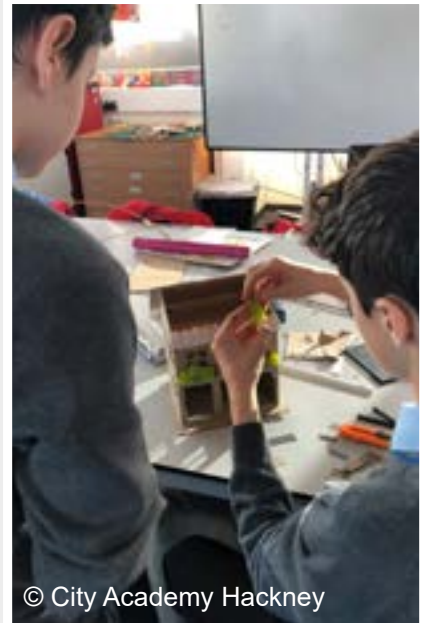
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Thank you for taking the time to think about your approach before marking HMD with your students. If you have any further questions or would like to discuss your plans, please contact the Education Officer on [education@hmd.org.uk](mailto:education@hmd.org.uk).

Please let us know about your school's HMD activity – big or small. It is really helpful for us to measure the reach and impact of HMD in schools across the UK, and to continue to improve our offer for educators: [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)