



HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
DAY TRUST

*Learning from genocide -
for a better future*

HMDT guest blog: HMD2022 – an opportunity for the whole school community

A guest blog by UCL Centre for Holocaust Education – long read version

Ten years ago, we piloted a new project at the [UCL Centre for Holocaust Education](#). Entitled the '[Beacon Schools programme](#)', this initiative aimed to support teachers to embed excellent teaching and learning about the Holocaust in their schools and to share good practice with other schools in their locale.

A decade on, the programme has been a phenomenal success with nearly 200 Beacon Schools across the country and around 1,600 schools in their networks. As centres of educational excellence, Beacon Schools are highly committed to Holocaust education. Often these institutions adopt whole-school approaches which see the Holocaust encountered in multiple subject areas and through various extracurricular activities.

For Beacon Schools then, teaching, learning and thinking about the Holocaust is deeply rooted in school life. It is because of this cultural commitment that Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) is a significant date for Beacon Schools as it provides a key educational and commemorative moment in which all of the school community can participate. This is something we have seen repeatedly over the past ten years as our Beacon Schools have made HMD a key focal point in their school calendars.

The ways in which schools approach and mark HMD is invariably shaped by their individual contexts and circumstances – as, indeed, it should be. That said, we have seen through the work of our Beacon Schools that there are some general principles which can help to make your school's commemoration of HMD a success. Here are our ten 'top tips' to help you as you approach HMD 2022.

1. **Know the theme, plan early.** The [national theme](#) is an invaluable tool for giving your HMD activities focus and coherence. Make sure you and others who are leading the initiatives are familiar with the theme well in advance. At *Falinge Park High School*, they advocate that if HMD is to be meaningful it requires planning the day, event, week as you would any other learning opportunity. Have clear aims and objectives that all staff are aware of; pupils will be able to see through a tokenistic event and won't get the deep learning you want. That means thinking about resources, materials and approaches early- at *Moor End Academy*, they know sharing materials with staff who will be delivering lessons early is reassuring, especially for non-specialists, and allows time to plan, adapt to a specific class or group, secure knowledge, or troubleshoot.
2. **Link to school values and local issues.** While the national theme can provide focus, linking the theme to your school's ethos and values is key to making it relevant to the school community. At *East Point Academy* they utilised the national theme to make it

connect to their own concerns. At *Stowe School*, the local and alumni connection to Sir Nicholas Winton builds relevance and connection. Other schools with international partner school links, or those whose town twinning has a Holocaust related association, have found this a project to explore. School life opportunities, like tutor time and assemblies, serve to make the links between HMD and the schools' ethos clear and explicit. Assemblies can be very useful tools here: *Moor End Academy* regard an assembly on the day as critical: 'this launched the day and worked really well to help push the concept of HMD and what we wanted to achieve.'

3. **Support all staff.** It is important all staff know what HMD is, what it is intended to do, and how your school plans to mark it. At *Falinge Park*, staff briefings are used to explain their approach to Holocaust education. In other schools, staff who have had specialist training share their insights with colleagues in staff briefings and newsletters. If you wish to upskill your colleagues, encourage them to explore a growing range of short, online courses – such as [those produced by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education](#) – which will deepen their subject knowledge and enrich their involvement in HMD activities. HMDT also often run pre-HMD events with partner organisations, like the Centre, to support teachers and community groups in raising awareness, marking the day and applying the new national theme.
4. **Lead from the front.** Of course, a central factor in this preparatory work is making sure your leadership team is on board and is leading from the front. This can make a significant impact. As George Croxford, CEO of the *Royal Wootton Bassett Academy* observes:

'Make sure your leadership team are on board. If as Head you can't get to an event or classroom, you make sure someone else from SLT is there, but I think overtly supporting it, try to be part of it, to show the students and staff that you're interested, that the subject matter is important, that both from a curriculum and holistic perspective it's valued in your schools. But more than that, I would really urge you to be the outward face of local Holocaust Memorial Day commemorations, to lead by example and champion this work with your parents, staff, governors and community. I truly feel marking HMD2022 is a school leader's moral and educational imperative, it contributes so much to a school community and its outcomes are so often so valuable and unexpected. Go for it!'

5. **Energise through projects or initiatives.** Sometimes commemorative events can feel abstract and removed from students' daily lives and realm of experience. To ensure that your students don't feel detached from HMD, consider launching projects or initiatives to stimulate interest, pique curiosity, and then galvanise activity. At *Oakmoor School*, they launched a project called #LEON110 all around the school before they began learning about the story of Leon Greenman – an Englishman who survived the Holocaust. The same idea can be used for any part of the year to focus on an area or specifically HMD2022, so perhaps a competition or something like [the #Leon111 initiative](#) can inspire engagement and also [the Centre's tutor time stimuli for KS3, 4 and 5](#) can supplement the provision. In addition to a focus on the Holocaust, HMD allows the opportunity for schools to begin to explore stories of those persecuted by the Nazis and the victims of genocide past and present. Our alumni [Andy Lawrence's blog and short film](#) is sure to inspire in this regard.
6. **Be inclusive, creative and student-centred.** Last year *Hill Top Specialist Arts College* in Gateshead engaged all their students, verbal and non-verbal, in marking HMD. Classes and students placed candles in windows at home and school, took pictures and made a collage. Older students wrote prose on what light meant to them, whilst younger students used symbols to reflect on the national theme. The whole school watched the ceremony from HMD in various clips and the whole school community observed a two-minute silence. The year before, the *Hill Top* community made the HMD flame symbol with their

hands. Each hand was cut out and placed as a huge flame in the corridor. Students who had sensory issues with paint or dirty hands drew a hand. All the school community were involved. Students also painted stones with messages, and these were placed in the school's remembrance and poppy garden. This shows whether in specialist or mainstream settings it is possible, indeed necessary, that all learners can access and engage in HMD. There is a focus on stage, not just age suitability and a commitment to access, inclusion, and participation. At *Torpoint Community School* HMD has provided whole school literacy opportunities that have been innovative, engaging and creative. You can find [resources for SEND students here](#).

7. **Adopt a personal approach.** The Holocaust is not easy history to learn about. Its horrors are hard to comprehend, and it can feel overwhelming. To help young people, use personal stories to create points of access. Many schools have had survivors come in and speak to students. We would recommend this as a powerful tool for students and staff to engage with their stories, where possible. It is extremely powerful and results in meaningful discussions both during and after. At *East Point Academy* the immersion in personal stories is recognised as helping students connect more with the need for 'memorial'.
8. **Engage your parents, families and wider community:** use of social media, school website, newsletters. Reach out to your local MP, media, governors and perhaps across your Trust or school networks. At *Westminster Academy*, students and staff have used articles and newsletters to reach out to parents and wider school community about Holocaust Memorial Day. This year plans at the Academy include using student voice, 6th form students are writing an article for the school sixth form as well as the school-wide newsletter. A student visit is planned to the local Imperial War Museum's new exhibition and galleries, and there will be school wide tutor sessions on the topic to mark HMD. For example, last year at *Oakmoor School* they launched the school activities by informing and inviting families to engage, but also alerted them to the live online HMD ceremony broadcast. They asked families to support and light a candle and send a photo. The school then made a collage of all the pictures of the candles which turned out very well and become a display feature and focal point for reflection. Jen Trohear at *Lytham High School* created a loom 'Be the Light....' that went out to our students and was on school's website to reach the wider community. This was in lieu of the usual in person, year group assemblies.
9. **Explore disciplinary links - make HMD visible and relevant to each department or faculty area:** *Lytham High School* produced a slide for each department last year - the idea would be that teachers would project their subject specific slide to students as they arrived (in person or virtually) for their lesson. Each slide featured a story or stimulus related to the Holocaust, it was an opportunity to hook in each discipline and foreground personal stories. For example, in history students read about preservation of documents as evidence thanks to the Ringlebaum and Oneg Shabbat archive, in DT it was Barney Greenman's toy truck. Each slide was deliberately self-contained and explanatory so as non-specialist teachers across the school could project comfortably. Lead Teacher Jen Trohear prepared this via a PowerPoint last year, as they were teaching online, but this could work as a starter to classroom lessons. *Royal Wootton Bassett Academy* do something similar where, for the week of HMD each faculty, department display a Holocaust (or genocide) related story/artifact or stimuli that links to the national theme and to the subject area. This has significantly encouraged cross-curricular thinking, innovative/creative engagement and been a real opportunity to raise whole school awareness, introducing colleagues from range of disciplines to HMD – and that it is a whole school commitment or endeavour, not just the preserve of History department colleagues for example. As a result of these subject focused 'hooks', students were able to see the Holocaust through a range of lenses and it opened up space for reflection.

10. **Remain sensitive and aware:** Teaching and learning about the Holocaust affects people in different ways. Sometimes these affects can be seen and observed. Sometimes they cannot. It is important to always remain sensitive to this reality, and to be aware that traumatic history can intersect with people's personal experiences and circumstances. This is true for students and for adults, and given the importance of safeguarding in schools it has critical importance. Consider ways in which you can support staff and students who may be impacted by HMD, including the use of pastoral and support staff.

On 27 January, our Beacon Schools and thousands of others across the country will come together to remember the Holocaust and consider its significance and meanings for today. Taking this one day to pause and engage with it is crucially important. But so too is taking the time to enhance and improve the Holocaust education that students receive throughout the school year. By using the above top tips from our Beacon Schools, we hope that you can begin this critical endeavour.