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Countering Holocaust denial and distortion through education

Lesson activities for secondary education

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SHORT SUMMARY

Adaptable lessons to foster critical thinking, empathy and tolerance

Holocaust denial rejects historical facts outright, while distortion manipulates the narrative. Both phenomena undermine historical truth, fuel antisemitism, and attack democratic values. By addressing these issues, this set of lesson activities for secondary education seeks to build students' resilience against falsehoods through fostering critical thinking, empathy, and global citizenship.

It was developed by UNESCO and funded by the European Commission to equip educators with tools to confront the dangerous spread of Holocaust denial and distortion. With 12 engaging lessons, students aged 14 to 18 will explore the historical facts of the Holocaust while learning to critically evaluate misinformation in today's digital world.

From analyzing survivor testimonies to deconstructing harmful memes and conspiracy theories, this resource features 12 adaptable lessons that focus on historical literacy, media analysis, and social-emotional competencies.

Topics range from identifying denial and distortion, evaluating media and online sources, analyzing primary evidence like survivor testimonies, and understanding the misuse of Holocaust history in memes and conspiracy theories. Activities are scaffolded with questions, examples, and practical exercises to encourage analytical skills and promote meaningful classroom discussions.

The lessons also include suggestions for incorporating primary sources, visiting memorial sites, and addressing broader issues of genocide and hate. In doing so, the guide aims to not only preserve Holocaust memory but also strengthen the values of truth, empathy, and tolerance in younger generations.

49%

of Millennials and Gen Z
in the United States
of America have seen
Holocaust denial
or distortion posts
online



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"Since wars begin in the minds of men and women it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed"



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Countering Holocaust denial

and distortion through education

Lesson activities for secondary education

Foreword

Learning about the Holocaust is a critical lesson about the deadly consequences of slowly but surely accepting the unacceptable, through unchecked intolerance and dehumanization.

Tragically, myths and false information about the Holocaust have gained ground on social media, fueled by misinformation, conspiracy theories and prejudice. These harmful narratives incite hatred and split human society. Education is an essential tool to respond vigorously against such manipulation, and thus strengthen critical thinking and mutual respect.

This publication goes hand in hand with *Countering Holocaust denial and distortion through education: A guide for teachers*. Developed by UNESCO and funded by the European Commission, it is designed to provide educators with a comprehensive series of lesson activities aimed at countering Holocaust denial and distortion.

Through structured learning experiences, students are encouraged not only to assimilate historical facts, but also to critically engage with the sources of misinformation and the tactics used to distort the truth. These activities are carefully designed to build learners' knowledge and resilience by fostering critical thinking, media and information literacy, and empathy, so that they grow as global digital citizens.

The lessons presented here are practical and adaptable, allowing teachers to navigate sensitive topics while helping students develop a deeper understanding of the Holocaust and its enduring significance. Through historical analysis, discussion, and exploration of primary sources, students are encouraged to ask questions, scrutinize sources of information, and recognize how Holocaust distortion can be rooted in broader patterns of hate and antisemitism.

The guide goes beyond the teaching of historical facts; it equips students with the analytical skills necessary to identify falsehoods, challenge biased narratives, and reflect on the moral responsibilities that come with knowing and preserving truth. By fostering these capacities in young people, teachers can help build a generation more resilient to denial, distortion, and the harmful ideologies that accompany them.



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Introduction

The significant presence of Holocaust denial and distortion on online platforms is alarming. In 2022, UNESCO and the United Nations, together with the World Jewish Congress, published a report, *History under attack: Holocaust denial and distortion on social media*, sharing findings from their study that examined Holocaust denial and distortion on online platforms specifically.¹ The report recommends interventions at all levels of society.

Holocaust denial and distortion is dangerous. According to the report, 'denial and distortion of the Holocaust attacks truth and knowledge. It feeds on and spreads antisemitism and jeopardizes the understanding of one of the most tragic and violent episodes in the history of humanity: the genocide of six million Jews by Nazi Germany, its allies and collaborators.'² Denial is an inherent part of the genocide process itself, serving as a continuation of the Nazis' effort to erase Jewish existence. Furthermore, it is offensive to survivors and victims of the Holocaust, as well as to their memory. Additionally, Holocaust denial also attacks the values of democracy and human dignity. Jeopardizing the understanding of the Holocaust has profound consequences for young people, as it is crucial to ensure that future generations accurately learn about the Holocaust to prevent the recurrence of such atrocities and to build a more informed and just society.

The prevalence of Holocaust denial and distortion on social media emphasizes the need for young people to develop history, media, and information literacy through education.³ In addition to textbooks, curricula and guidance published at a national level within educational systems on teaching and learning about the Holocaust, teachers may benefit from specific guidance on ways to teach students in the classroom how to recognize, understand and counter Holocaust denial and distortion they encounter online.

The UNESCO publication *Countering Holocaust denial and distortion: A guide for teachers* provides information about the different forms and functions of Holocaust denial and distortion, and pedagogical guidance on preventing, addressing and responding to this form of disinformation. This publication provides practical lesson activities that aim to build the knowledge and skills of young people, to make them resilient against Holocaust denial and distortion.

1 UNESCO and United Nations. *History under attack: Holocaust denial and distortion on social media*, 2022. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382159>.

2 Ibid.

3 *Media and information literate citizens: think critically, click wisely!* (Second edition of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy for Educators and Learners), UNESCO, 2021. <https://www.unesco.org/mil4teachers/en/curriculum?hub=750>

Key definitions

What is Holocaust denial?

Holocaust denial refers to discourse and propaganda that deny the historical reality and extent of the extermination of Jews by the Nazis and their accomplices during the Second World War, known as the Holocaust or Shoah and specifically to any attempt to claim that the Holocaust did not take place.⁴ It may include publicly denying or calling into doubt the use of principal mechanisms of destruction (such as gas chambers, mass shooting, starvation and torture) or the intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people. Holocaust denial in its various forms is an expression of antisemitism.⁵

What is Holocaust distortion?

Holocaust distortion significantly and deliberately misrepresents its historical facts.⁶ Current expressions of Holocaust distortion are many and varied. The number of victims might be grossly underestimated; the number of helpers and rescuers inflated; and difficult parts of a country's own national history might be overlooked or omitted (for example, holding only Hitler and the leading Nazis responsible, downplaying the role of collaborators and the widespread complicity of many ordinary people in the genocide, including in occupied and allied countries).

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition provides a foundation for recognizing Holocaust denial and distortion.⁷ The United Nations General Assembly used the working definition in its Resolution A/76/L.30 (20 January 2022), which condemned denial and distortion of the Holocaust.

Though Holocaust denial and distortion differ in their specific meanings, these categories are permeable. Holocaust deniers often use distortion in their rhetoric, whereas those who distort Holocaust history and memory are not denying it happened.

Learn more about different forms of Holocaust denial and distortion, 'memory laws' and about the right freedom of expression in the UNESCO guide *Countering Holocaust denial and distortion: A guide for teachers*.

What is media and information literacy?

Media and information literacy is a set of interrelated information, digital and media competencies that help people to maximize advantages and minimize harms from the information they receive.⁸ It enables them to critically and effectively engage with: information, communication content, the institutions that facilitate information and content, and the use of digital technologies. Skills in these areas are indispensable for all citizens, regardless of their ages or backgrounds.

4 United Nations Resolution on Holocaust Denial, 13 January 2022. <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/ltd/n22/230/12/pdf/n2223012.pdf>

5 For more information about antisemitism, please see the UNESCO page on addressing antisemitism through education. UNESCO. 2024. How UNESCO is training educators to address antisemitism and discrimination in schools. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/how-unesco-training-educators-address-antisemitism-and-discrimination-schools>

6 Ibid.

7 <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-holocaust-denial-distortion>

8 Media and information literate citizens: think critically, click wisely! (Second edition of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy for Educators and Learners.) UNESCO, 2021. <https://www.unesco.org/mil4teachers/en/curriculum?hub=750>

Aim of this guide

In today's digital age, Holocaust education remains critically important and needs adapting to the ways that young people get their information. This guide is designed for teachers, to support their classroom teaching on how to counter Holocaust denial and distortion. The lessons and activities in this guide aim to help students build knowledge and skills to evaluate the information they consume and create about the Holocaust across various platforms.

This guide should be used in conjunction with UNESCO's *Countering Holocaust denial and distortion: A guide for teachers*, which outlines the different forms and functions of Holocaust denial and distortion, and the relevant teaching and learning approaches that help learners resist and counter this form of disinformation.

These activities are not meant to replace lessons about the Holocaust; rather, they are intended to supplement existing lessons. It is necessary for learners to have a solid understanding of the Holocaust, including but not limited to the scope and scale of the Holocaust, how and why it happened, contexts and developments, the various actors in this history, key moments and events, and the dangerous ideology that contributed to the Holocaust.⁹ Learners will build upon their understanding of the history to identify, evaluate and analyse examples of Holocaust distortion and denial, and their impact.

The activities in this guide were designed for classroom learning in formal secondary education. However, they can be modified for informal settings. That said, the opportunity to visit museums and memorials and to meet Holocaust survivors and their families may be a valuable complement to classroom learning.

Audience

The lessons and activities in this guide are geared to students in high school or upper grades, aged 14–18. They can be used in a variety of subjects, including social studies, history, technology, literature and current affairs. Most can be used both with and without computer or internet access. When a video clip is included, a transcript is usually also provided. Teachers should choose the medium and activities that work best in their classrooms and for their students.

Teachers are the best judge of their local contexts and how to integrate Holocaust education into relevant subjects. The approaches and activities in this guide can also be applied to other cases of genocide and atrocities.

⁹ For further information, please see the guidance of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance: <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/recommendations-teaching-learning-holocaust>

Structure

This guide includes twelve lessons that focus on developing key media and information literacy, historical literacy skills, and social and emotional competencies. Critical thinking is built into each lesson. Scaffolded questions ensure students can apply critical thinking when analysing sources. The lessons include various activities that can be modified to students' needs. Primary sources include historical evidence of the Holocaust, and contemporary examples of Holocaust distortion and denial. The exercises and questions offer students tools for engaging with content that references the Holocaust, especially on social media.

The lessons are not in a particular order and each one can stand alone. Each lesson includes recommended instructions. Educators are best placed to know their students' maturity, knowledge levels and learning styles, so they are encouraged to adapt these activities as needed for their specific classroom settings and needs. For example, where the lessons suggest discussion questions, educators can choose to have students respond individually, in small groups, or as a large group. If the discussion is conducted individually or in small groups, educators should factor in time for a brief readout or review, to ensure all students have learned about and understood all the content of the activity. One suggestion for small groups is a 'jigsaw' activity,¹⁰ in which students teach each other what they have learned during the exercise.

Additionally, most activity questions include responses in brackets. The exception is opinion questions. The responses are not comprehensive but offer a range of possible answers. Educators are encouraged to allow students to answer the questions first and only then to use the provided responses to supplement student responses.

Introduction to the topic

■ Lesson 1: What is Holocaust denial? What is Holocaust distortion? Identifying Holocaust denial and distortion, and understanding the impact

This lesson introduces students to various types of Holocaust distortion and prompts students to analyse the damage they cause.

¹⁰ A 'jigsaw' activity refers to a small group activity in which students begin in a 'home' group focusing on one topic/question/resource. They become 'experts' on their group's topic. Students are then shuffled, forming new groups with one representative from each of the 'home' groups. Each 'expert' shares what they know about their topic so that every student is exposed to all the topics. By doing this, each student will have learned about each example from their peers. In this case, each original group discusses one image. Then new groups are formed with representatives from each image group, who teach their new group about the image they originally discussed. Read more at <https://www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/jigsaw>

Lessons dealing with media and information literacy and digital literacy

- **Lesson 2: Not all websites are reliable: how to evaluate a website**

Students will learn how to evaluate digital sources, and to understand how information is shared online and how it can be manipulated.

- **Lesson 3: Evaluating media about the Holocaust**

Students will learn to analyse information from primary sources, evaluate content, and understand how the source affects how we understand and interpret the information.

- **Lesson 4: Boundaries of meme culture: Holocaust memes**

Students will evaluate the use of memes in messaging, and consider how, when, and in what format it is appropriate to share content online.

- **Lesson 5: The age of AI: how to discern what is real and what is not**

Students will reflect on the uses of artificial intelligence (AI) and challenges of AI-generated content, as well as learn to recognize and evaluate AI-generated content.

- **Lesson 6: Looking at multiple angles: understanding different perspectives**

People interpret events differently due to various factors, including biases, perspectives, and context. Students will examine how social media trends can blur the lines between appropriate and inappropriate uses of history and memory.

Lessons dealing with historical primary sources

- **Lesson 7: The historical record: examining evidence from the Holocaust**

Students will develop a deeper understanding of the importance of primary sources as evidence by examining some historical examples.

- **Lesson 8: 'I was there. I saw it. It happened to me': The value of survivor testimony**

Students will develop an understanding of the value and contribution of witness testimony as a primary source and evidence of the Holocaust. They will develop skills to recognize the challenges, and an understanding of the impact that Holocaust distortion and denial has on survivors and on Holocaust memory.

- **Lesson 9: Context is key: benefits and challenges of photos as visual evidence**

Students will build skills in evaluating photographs and images, specifically to understand that visuals do not always indicate fact, especially given the use of technology today.

Lessons dealing with forms or manifestations of Holocaust denial and distortion

■ Lesson 10: Countering conspiracy theories about the Holocaust

Students will learn some of the conspiracy theories that exist about the Holocaust and consider ways to respond to them.

■ Lesson 11: When are Holocaust comparisons appropriate?

Students will learn to check if a comparison to the Holocaust is appropriate and understand the dangers of inappropriate comparisons to the Holocaust.

■ Lesson 12: National narratives and memorialization

Students will consider memorialization in national contexts.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, an organization with delegates from thirty-five Member Countries and nine Observer Countries, whose mission is to advance and promote Holocaust education, remembrance, and research, offers the following recommendations for teaching about the Holocaust:¹¹

- Do not be afraid to approach the subject of the Holocaust
- Be precise in use of language and define the term 'Holocaust'
- Give broad coverage to this subject and contextualize the history
- Create a positive learning environment, with an active pedagogy and a learner-centred approach
- Be responsive to the background, emotions and concerns of the learners
- Be reflective about purpose and rationale when using written and visual materials, especially those of a graphic nature
- Individualize the history by translating statistics into personal stories
- Create an opportunity to examine the complicated nature of roles people played rather than reinforcing stereotypes
- Do not attempt to explain away the perpetrators as 'inhuman monsters'
- Exercise caution when using simulations and role-play
- Encourage the study of local, regional, national, and global history and memory
- Explore how an interdisciplinary approach can enrich understanding of the Holocaust

¹¹ Explanations of these recommendations can be found here: <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/recommendations-teaching-learning-holocaust>; additional guidance from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum can be found here: <https://www.ushmm.org/teach/fundamentals/guidelines-for-teaching-the-holocaust>

- Indicate that the Holocaust was not inevitable
- Discuss the complexity of history
- Help learners to develop historical consciousness by studying interpretations and remembrance of the Holocaust
- Represent the Jewish people beyond the terms of the Holocaust
- Avoid legitimizing distortion and denial of the past
- Provide learners with access to primary sources
- Use witness testimony to create a unique link to the past
- Be aware of the potential and also the limitations of all instructional materials
- Use fictional and imaginative resources with care
- Help learners to work critically with internet sources.

Source: Adapted from International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust. <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/recommendations-teaching-learning-holocaust>

Lastly, here is a list of some reputable Holocaust archives and historical documentation sites to support educators and students as they explore Holocaust denial and distortion online. These sites are reliable and provide accurate information about Holocaust history and memory. These are sources that will help build the foundation of Holocaust history and knowledge that is necessary to study Holocaust denial and distortion.

- AboutHolocaust.org (World Jewish Congress and UNESCO): <https://aboutholocaust.org>
- Anne Frank House (The Netherlands): <https://www.annefrank.org>
- Arolsen Archives, International Center on Nazi Persecution (based in Germany): <https://arolsen-archives.org>
- Mémorial de la Shoah (France): <https://www.memorialdelashoah.org>
- Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau (Poland): <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/>
- NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies (The Netherlands): <https://www.niod.nl>
- The Wiener Holocaust Library (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): <https://www.theholocaustexplained.org>
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (United States of America): <https://www.ushmm.org>
- USC Shoah Foundation (United States of America): <https://sfi.usc.edu>
- Yad Vashem (Israel): <https://www.yadvashem.org>

Lesson 1.

What is Holocaust denial?

What is Holocaust distortion?

Rationale:

This lesson is intended to introduce students to the concepts of Holocaust denial and distortion by examining types of Holocaust denial and distortion. Students are prompted to analyse the risks and harm caused by this type of information manipulation.

Learning objectives:

- To understand the definitions of denial and distortion.
- To consider why people, institutions and governments manipulate the history of the Holocaust.
- To identify what is at risk with Holocaust denial and distortion.

Subjects: social studies, history, citizenship education

Skills: critical thinking, building empathy, respect for human dignity

Target learners: high school, ages 14–18

Time needed: 60–75 minutes

Required: printed pages, computer and internet access

Notes to educators:

- Most activity questions include responses in brackets, except for opinion questions. The responses are not comprehensive but offer a range of possible answers. Educators are encouraged to allow students to answer the questions first and only then to use the provided responses to supplement student responses.
- This lesson provides some examples of Holocaust distortion. Educators can use other examples of Holocaust denial and distortion and apply the same approach and questions.
- The microphone icon indicates what should be said aloud. The arrow indicates guidance for the educator.

Introduction (10–12 minutes)



We will begin this lesson by reading Holocaust survivor Marta Wise's testimony.¹²

Born: 8 October 1934 in Bratislava (Slovakia/Czechoslovakia)

Interview location: Caulfield, Victoria, Australia

School location: near Melbourne, Australia

Transcript

'I think it's important that youth hear something from a survivor. And now, let's face it, I'm one of the youngest survivors – from Auschwitz, definitely. I don't think there's many my age. And I think it's important that they hear it from yourself. There was an interesting case I had in Camberwell High some years ago. And I must mention that. I spoke to children. I used to speak there for over 10 years every year, to the year 10s. And it's a very large school. I don't know if you know the school. And they are multicultural, very multicultural. And the – the first time I spoke for one for half – for 45 minutes, and it just wasn't enough. So after that, the – the woman in charge organized always to have a double period and put – brought all the kids into the library.

And usually, they are as quiet as you can hear a pin drop. And one particular occasion, there was a fight outside after I spoke. And usually she gives me two periods. Because I said to her, it doesn't make – you can't put it all into a very short period of time. And these are year 10 – year 10 children. And we – you – you've got to remember. So they're not that sophisticated. But that's when they do German history or something. And they usually ask questions and are very interested. And there was this – this fight outside as I – as we were walking out. And she found out later – she – she called me. And she found out later. It was a child, a boy of – the son of a journalist who had a fight with the other kids because he said, she's lying. And all she said was lies. And it didn't happen like that. And there were no death camps, there were only concentration camps where people worked. And she's a liar.

And so there, he had a fistfight with some other kids who says, how can you say it? You saw her number on her arm. And so this woman who organizes the talks said – called them in. And she said, listen, your father's a journalist. Go home. My father said it's a lie. That's what he said. It's a lie and it's not true. So she said, I tell you what. Go home, tell your dad that you heard this lady

¹² Please note that this clip references a child whose parent lied to them. Educators should be aware of the sensitive nature of this clip and determine if it is appropriate for their students. It is accessible from <https://iwwitness.usc.edu/sites/denial>

talk who said she was in concentration camp in Auschwitz, and you saw her number. It's – she's talking about what happened to her. Ask him if he thinks it's – if it's true, or not, or whether it's a lie, that she's lying. And then come back and see me. So he came back. You know, we're talking about, what 15, 16-year-olds. And he came back with his tail between his legs. And he said, yes, I had a talk with Dad. And I told him that I actually heard this lady talk. I saw her number on her arm. And he admitted that he's an antisemite and that that's why he's always been writing and saying that it didn't happen. So she rang me up to tell me because she knows how much it takes out of me. And she just felt that it makes it a bit worth, you know, the pain more worthwhile.'

Source: USC Shoah Foundation. © USC Shoah Foundation*

► **After viewing or reading Marta's clip, ask students to answer the following questions:**¹³

- What stands out for you in this testimony clip?
- What questions do you have based on what Marta shared?



In this lesson, we will learn what Holocaust denial and distortion are, and examine some examples while considering why people may manipulate the history of the Holocaust, and identify the risks of these claims.

► **Ask students to respond to the following questions through discussion or an activity such as visual mapping:**¹⁴

- What does the term denial mean? [Refusal to admit the truth or reality of something, refusal to fulfil a request or desire.]
- What does the term distortion mean? [The act of altering or manipulating information to mislead or obscure.]
- What is similar and what different between denial and distortion? [Both refer to manipulation of language and facts, but denial refutes the truth about something whereas distortion is based on some truth, but misrepresents the information.]

13 This can also be done in as a reflective writing activity.

14 Visual mapping refers to an educational strategy to visually document associations with terms or concepts.



During and after the Holocaust, denial and distortion have been used for dangerous attacks on the truth of this historical event. During the Holocaust, the Nazis integrated denial and distortion into their genocidal mechanisms, such as with the Theresienstadt Ghetto or the destruction of evidence of killing centres and other camps. Denial and distortion has continued since the end of the Holocaust in 1945. Marta described an experience she had with Holocaust denial.

Defining distortion and denial (15–25 minutes)



We will now watch a three-minute video from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum¹⁵ in which Ambassador Deborah Lipstadt,¹⁶ the Holocaust historian and former United States Department of State's Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism, explains the difference between Holocaust denial and distortion. Or read the transcript below. Among her many achievements, Deborah Lipstadt is well known for having won a libel case brought by the Holocaust denier David Irving and successfully proving that her characterization of him as a denier was true.

- ▶ Have students watch the video through once without taking notes.
- ▶ Then have them watch it a second time, and ask them to take notes on the following questions:
 1. According to Ambassador Lipstadt, what are the different forms of denial?
 - [Hardcore denial: denial that the Nazis planned and implemented a systematic annihilation of the Jews.
 - Softcore denial: tendency to accept that the Holocaust happened but to manipulate elements of the history to distort the truth. What Deborah Lipstadt refers to as 'softcore denial' is what we now call distortion.]

15 <https://www.ushmm.org/antisemitism/holocaust-denial-and-distortion/explaining-holocaust-denial> It is advised to share an advance warning: there are graphic images in this video clip.

16 For information about Ambassador Lipstadt, please see <https://www.state.gov/biographies/deborah-lipstadt>

2. What examples does Ambassador Lipstadt give for each form of denial?
 - [Hardcore denial (referred to as simply Holocaust denial today): that there was no planned centralized programme of annihilation of the Jews by the Nazis; that Jews made up the Holocaust for financial gain and to get sympathy.
 - Softcore denial (referred to as distortion today): questioning the number of victims, questioning the use of gas chambers.]
3. According to Ambassador Lipstadt, why do people deny or distort the Holocaust?
 - [To instil and foster antisemitism; out of preconceived prejudice against Jews, such as believing that Jews are driven by money and the desire for a state, which are both stereotypes associated with Jews and antisemitism.]
4. What other reasons might there be for why people deny or distort the Holocaust?
 - [To exonerate the Nazis by clearing their own and Hitler's name of the crime; to position themselves as victims rather than perpetrators; to remove responsibility for the crimes from the Nazis or a country's government or population.]
5. What evidence from the Holocaust does Lipstadt emphasize, and how does this help us to tackle denial and distortion?
 - [Testimony from survivors, bystanders and perpetrators.]

Transcript:

*This can be shared as one long text or split into two parts, as noted below.

Part I:

'Holocaust denial is a form of antisemitism. The only reason to deny the Holocaust is to inculcate and foster antisemitism. The Holocaust has the dubious distinction of being the best documented genocide in the world, so for anybody to disbelieve, they've got to come to it with some sort of preconceived notion.

Holocaust denial takes different forms, and I divided it into hardcore Holocaust denial and softcore Holocaust denial. Hardcore Holocaust denial is the argument made by deniers that there was no planned centralized programme of annihilation of the Jews by the Nazis, that this whole idea of eliminating the Jews from the European continent and beyond never happened.

If you would ask them, "Well, why would the Jews make up this myth?" is that they did it for financial gain and to get the sympathy of the world in order to get a State. That in and of itself makes Holocaust denial a form of antisemitism because the rationale they give – to get money and to get a State – are of course at the centre of the stereotypes associated with antisemitism.'

Part II:

'But softcore denial does not deny the Holocaust. There were people who would say, "Well, of course the Holocaust happened, but was it really six million? Of course the Holocaust happened, but were there really gas chambers?" I think any thoughtful person today knows that that's a ridiculous kind of thing.

First of all, for deniers to be right, who has to be wrong? Well certainly all the survivors. You have the bystanders, but most of all, you have the perpetrators. What they said was, "I didn't do it. I was only following orders." So they had these different excuses, but they never said it didn't happen.

The audience often are antisemites who are looking to have their feelings confirmed or people who might not be overt antisemites but somehow are discomforted with the idea of Jews as victim. This is an attack on society at large. In almost every society where they've gone after Jews first, they've gone after other people after that. Prejudice has to be fought and amongst those prejudices, antisemitism has to be fought.'

Source: © United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Available at: <https://www.ushmm.org/antisemitism/holocaust-denial-and-distortion/explaining-holocaust-denial>

- ▶ Discuss responses to the video questions.

Activity (20–25 minutes)

- ▶ Once students have a grasp of these definitions, they will examine examples of Holocaust distortion ('softcore denial') through images in the worksheet.



We will analyse several examples of different types of distortion.¹⁷ As you assess these, please consider the following questions:

- Who or what is represented in the image?
- Who may have taken the photo and why?
- What is the message of the image?
- How does the image and/or message distort Holocaust history? What harm might it cause?
- Why might someone choose to manipulate Holocaust history in this way? What motivations might they have?

Reflection (10 minutes)



After examining several examples of Holocaust distortion, let's consider the impact of this distortion.

- ▶ Discuss the following questions:
 - What is at risk if we do not preserve truth and accuracy? [Disinformation, lack of understanding of historical truth, risk of repeating the crimes of the Holocaust, offence to victims and survivors, and to their memory.]
 - What is the impact of sharing falsehoods about the history of the Holocaust? [It is dangerous to the truth and memory of this history. Many forms of distortion also have antisemitic undertones and spread hatred of Jews. Yet in some forms of distortion antisemitism is not apparent or not present at all, such as a nationalist intent to glorify one's own country by minimizing its collaboration with the Nazis.]

¹⁷ For more information about specific types of denial and distortion, please see UNESCO's *Countering Holocaust denial and distortion: guide for teachers*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000392455>

- How might Holocaust distortion impact different groups, including but not limited to the memory of victims, survivors, perpetrators and nations? [Victims – offensive to their memory and strips them of their victimhood; survivors – offensive to their memory and denies them dignity and their experiences; perpetrators – risks removing blame from those who should continue to be held accountable for their crimes; nations – affects the way they remember their past and how it shapes their national identity.]
- At the beginning of the lesson, we heard Marta Wise describe an experience she had with Holocaust denial. What is the value of hearing about the impact of Holocaust distortion from a Holocaust survivor? [It humanizes the concepts and offers a tangible example of the impact of these dangerous falsehoods; it can also encourage empathy for other people.]
- Why are Holocaust denial and antisemitism more likely to spread when there are no more living Holocaust survivors? [Because there will no longer be eyewitnesses and people who lived through this history, and testimony is an important type of evidence. However, there is also a wealth of archival and physical evidence at authentic historical sites that can help dispel myths about the Holocaust and distortions or denials.]
- Why is it important to combat Holocaust denial and distortion? [Some responses: because persecution of the Jews by the Nazis, their allies and collaborators escalated from words to discrimination to dehumanization to genocide; because denial strips Jews of their role as victims, instead portraying them as liars, perpetrators and responsible for the war; because the Holocaust shows us that when one group is targeted, many other groups become vulnerable; because denial or distortion of history is an attack on truth and understanding of ourselves, our societies and our values; and because Holocaust denial seeks to revive Nazism and legitimize a genocide.]

Additional resource

If students are interested in learning more about different types of Holocaust denial and distortion and their harmful effects, guide them to this 37-minute discussion about contemporary Holocaust denial and distortion and the dangers of manipulation (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), *Dangerous Efforts to Deny and Distort Holocaust History*.¹⁸

18 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNVouCGvaiE>

1. WORKSHEET: What is Holocaust denial? What is Holocaust distortion?¹⁹

Example 1



Robert Keith Packer wears a 'Camp Auschwitz' shirt during the riot at the U.S. Capitol on 6 January 2021, courtesy of the United States Department of Justice.²⁰

Context:

- **Auschwitz:** the largest and most notorious Nazi camp complex. The gate to Auschwitz I, the concentration camp, had a sign that read Arbeit Macht Frei [Work Sets You Free].

Source: United States Department of Justice*

- **6 January 2021:** right-wing supporters of the outgoing president of the United States of America, Donald Trump, attacked the U.S. Capitol in order to prevent the U.S. Congress from voting and formalizing Joe Biden as the incoming president.

Answer the following questions about this image:

- Who or what is represented in the image? [A man wearing a sweatshirt that says 'Camp Auschwitz Work Brings Freedom' with a photo of a skull.]
- Who may have taken the photo and why? [A journalist, an observer, or someone taking part in the riot; why: to document what they saw, to capture a shocking image.]
- What is the message of the image? [Celebrating the Holocaust and Auschwitz (the most notorious symbol of the Holocaust), promoting the English translation of the sign above the gate of Auschwitz I, Arbeit Macht Frei.]

¹⁹ The three images included offer just a few examples of Holocaust distortion. They each have the same set of questions to reflect the approach. This allows flexibility for educators who choose to run this activity in small groups. Educators can use additional images of their choosing for this exercise. Where appropriate, extension activity questions include: What are the risks of posting or amplifying this image? What should we do when we encounter such material online? What strategies are there to address them? How can we be good digital citizens?

²⁰ <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/press-release/file/1353201/dl>

- How does the image and/or message distort Holocaust history? What harm might it cause? [It glorifies the Holocaust, harms the memory of victims and survivors, and is offensive by promoting or celebrating the place where more than 1.1 million Nazi victims were killed, of whom about 1 million were Jews.]
- Why might someone choose to manipulate Holocaust history in this way? What motivations might they have? [Antisemitism; a desire to shock; perhaps they think the Holocaust was a positive event, or belong to a white nationalist cause or movement.]

Example 2

Washington State Representative Jim Walsh wore a yellow Star of David on his shirt in a video streamed on Facebook where he criticizes the state's promotion of the COVID-19 vaccine. In the comments below the livestream, Walsh wrote, 'It's an echo from history ... In the current context, we're all Jews.'²¹



Photo credit: Margarita Young/Shutterstock.com*

Vancouver, Canada, 8 September 2021. View of sign 'The Holocaust Began by Demonization and Marginalization. Never Again!' during a rally against the British Columbia Vaccine Card outside Vancouver city hall, Canada.

21 Hannah Knowles, 'Wearing a Star of David, another lawmaker compares coronavirus measures to the Holocaust,' Washington Post, 30 June 2021; this example is taken from a lesson package on Holocaust distortion created by Facing History. For the full lesson, please see <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/holocaust-trivialization-distortion>

Answer the following questions about this example:

- Why do you think these people chose to reference the Holocaust to support their causes? What were the speakers hoping to accomplish with these references?
- What are some differences you can think of between the experiences of recent groups of people who have used the Star of David symbol and the experiences of Jews who were forced to wear it during the Nazi regime and the Holocaust?
- What harm do these comparisons cause?
- How might seeing references to the Star of David impact people who have a personal connection to the Holocaust?²²
- Why might people object to the use of symbols associated with the Holocaust (such as the Star of David) to draw attention to contemporary political causes?
- What are the dangers of seeing a historic event as only a symbol, rather than as an actual concrete atrocity that happened to real people, orchestrated by real people?
- How do the images and/or messages distort Holocaust history? What harm might they cause? [Inappropriate comparisons that distort the reality of life for Jews under the Nazis.]
- Why might someone choose to manipulate Holocaust history in this way? What might be their motivation? [Antisemitism, ignorance.]

Example 3

'The Holocaust on your plate'

In 2003, PETA – People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals – organized an exhibition called 'The Holocaust on your plate', juxtaposing images of the Holocaust with images of factory farming, such as images of children behind barbed wire with images of pigs behind bars; emaciated people with emaciated animals; and people crammed into bunks with chickens in a battery farm. The intention of the exhibition was to raise awareness about the inhumane treatment of animals in factory farming and mass animal transportation.

Source: IHRA training programme on countering Holocaust distortion, in partnership with UNESCO <https://training.againstholocaustdistortion.org/materials/annex-1-case-studies/>

22 For further reading, please see <https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-releases/why-holocaust-analogies-are-dangerous>

Answer the following questions about this example:

- Why do you think these people chose to reference the Holocaust to support their causes? What were the speakers hoping to accomplish with these references?
- What harm do these comparisons cause?
- How might seeing references to Auschwitz-Birkenau impact people who have a personal connection to the Holocaust?
- Why might people object to the use of symbols associated with the Holocaust to draw attention to contemporary causes?
- What are the dangers of seeing a historic event as just a symbol, rather than as an actual concrete atrocity that happened to real people, orchestrated by real people?
- Why might someone choose to manipulate Holocaust history in this way? What might be their motivation? [Antisemitism, ignorance.]

Example 4

Tartu Art Museum

In 2015, an art exhibition at Estonia's Tartu Art Museum was dedicated to remembering the Holocaust in various ways, including 'through the prism of humour'. The show was advertised with a poster resembling a photo taken after the liberation of Auschwitz, except that the 'Jewish prisoners' looked well fed and dressed and grinned menacingly at the camera. One film in the exhibition portrayed naked actors playing tag in what is supposed to represent a gas chamber. A painting depicted the famous Hollywood sign in California replaced by the word Holocaust. The show sparked outrage in Estonia and beyond, and the exhibition was eventually removed.

Source: IHRA training programme on countering Holocaust distortion, in partnership with UNESCO <https://training.againstholocaustdistortion.org/materials/annex-1-case-studies/>

Answer the following questions about this example:

- In your opinion, what are the factors that contribute to the spreading of this form of Holocaust distortion? [You can refer to individual factors (beliefs, values, competences or lack thereof), societal aspects (social structures, propaganda, etc.), technological aspects (the role of social media, etc.)]
- Why do you think some people engage in this form of Holocaust distortion? Do you think they are aware of its negative impact?
- Why do people make jokes about the Holocaust? Is 'dark' humour ever acceptable? What is at risk?
- What would your response be if you saw an advertisement for this art exhibition? How can young people react to issues that cause harm or spread falsehoods?

Example 5



Source: Auschwitz Memorial X/Twitter Account, 1 December 2019.*
<https://twitter.com/AuschwitzvMuseum/status/1201069830553649153>²³

Answer the following questions about this example:

- Why are these 'Christmas ornaments' considered a form of Holocaust distortion? Why are they harmful?
- Who might find these ornaments offensive?
- In your opinion, what factors contribute to the spreading of this form of Holocaust distortion?
- [Individual factors (beliefs, values, competences or lack thereof), societal aspects (social structures, propaganda, etc.), technological aspects (the role of social media, etc.)]
- Why do you think some people engage in this form of Holocaust distortion? Do you think they are aware of its negative impact?
- What would your response be if you saw this product for sale? How can young people react to issues that cause harm or spread falsehoods?

²³ See also <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50625558>

Lesson 2.

Not all websites are reliable:
how to evaluate a website

Rationale:

Many of us search on the internet to find quick answers to a range of questions – including research topics. This session is intended to provide skills to evaluate information that emerges from these internet searches. This is particularly important for content related to the Holocaust, because of the rise in Holocaust denial and distortion. This lesson focuses on how to evaluate a website, rather than looking solely at the content.

Learning objectives:

- To learn how to evaluate digital sources in order to detect and guard against spreading Holocaust denial and distortion.
- To understand how information is shared online and how it can be manipulated.

Subjects: technology, information and computer studies, citizenship education, history education

Skills: media and information literacy, digital citizenship, critical thinking

Target learners: high school, ages 14–18

Time needed: 20–30 minutes

Required: computer and internet access

Notes to educators:

- Most activity questions include responses in brackets, except opinion questions. The responses are not comprehensive but offer a range of possible answers. Educators are encouraged to allow students to answer the questions first and only then to use the provided responses to supplement student responses.
- The microphone icon indicates what should be said aloud. The arrow indicates guidance for the educator.

Introduction (3–5 minutes)

- ▶ Open this lesson with the following questions for students to discuss or respond to in writing.
 - When you begin a search on the internet, where do you typically start? Do you open a browser and type directly into it? Do you go to a specific website to begin your search?



Not all websites provide the same or accurate information about a topic. For example, Wikipedia is a site where users often get their initial information. However, not all information in Wikipedia articles is accurate, reliable or credible. Wikipedia entries may contain errors, and they are subject to considerable public control, especially related to Holocaust history.²⁴ This activity aims to help users build skills for evaluating which sites provide accurate, reliable and credible information.



Although it is relevant for any topic, evaluating digital sources matters when seeking accurate information about the Holocaust because of the prevalence of mis- and disinformation online.²⁵

Activity (10–15 minutes)



As a class, we will ask a question on a search browser after opening a 'New Private Window,' because using a standard browser window allows sites to record past searches. If a user repeatedly searches for Holocaust-denying content, the algorithm will prioritize related links in future searches, potentially leading the user into an ideological echo chamber. Browsing in a private window prevents the browser from storing this search history, reducing the risk of being influenced by biased or extremist content.

- ▶ Educators should identify a question about the Holocaust to use as a model for evaluating a website.

24 Jan Grabowski and Shira Klein. 2023. Wikipedia's Intentional Distortion of the History of the Holocaust, *The Journal of Holocaust Research*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25785648.2023.2168939>

25 Where there are data voids on the internet, there is a high chance for learners to encounter mis- and disinformation. Data voids refer to spaces on the internet where there are frequently searched topics but few results exist or are generated, allowing for more easily accessible mis- and disinformation.



For example, let's research the following: There are people who maliciously raise doubts about the scale of the Holocaust as not all survivors have tattoos on their forearms.²⁶

Note to educators:

Although tattooed numbers are one of the most recognizable symbols of the Holocaust, most Holocaust survivors and victims were not tattooed. Tattoos were only given to prisoners in the Auschwitz concentration camp complex, and only if they were selected to work – not if they were sent directly to the gas chambers.²⁷ Additionally, towards the end of the war, not all prisoners selected for labour got a tattoo.

- ▶ **Demonstrate the approach to evaluating websites through lateral reading: analyse the source itself and other key information before evaluating the content:**
 - **Decide which search engine to use.**
 - **Type this question (or related keywords) into the browser: Why do some Holocaust survivors have tattoos and others don't?**
 - **Review the top sources that are generated and choose one to use as an example.²⁸**
 - [Smithsonian Magazine: does not answer the question, but it can be helpful for the exercise of evaluating a website as it is a reliable publication.
 - AboutHolocaust.org: is reliable and answers the question, offers the opportunity to review a multi-institutional website that does not have a named author.
 - Quora: offers challenges by multiple authors whose responses are not verified or the authors are not qualified.]
 - **Using a Google search, apply the three dots test. Beside each of the search engine results there are three vertical dots. Click on the dots and a panel will open on the right-hand side of the screen with information about the source. Verify the authenticity of the source.**

26 This lesson activity is inspired by Mike Caulfield and Sam Wineburg's guide, *Verified: How to think straight, get duped less, and make better decisions about what to believe online* (2023).

27 <https://aboutholocaust.org/en/facts/why-do-some-jews-who-survived-the-holocaust-have-a-number-tattooed-on-their-arm>

28 Please note that the three examples listed here were the top three sites listed during a pre-publication search. Each time this same question was searched, the list changed. This serves as an example, but educators will need to adapt, depending on what their own search generates.

- To assess a point of view: open the website and first go to the About section of the site. What information does it provide? Is it credible? Does it identify a point of view or specific leaning? How can you tell?
 - Research the author(s): open another tab to search the author(s) name(s) in Google Scholar. Can you verify the author's background? Is the author a reliable and qualified person to write the information?²⁹
 - Review the content: how is the information presented? Do the authors cite their sources?³⁰ If so, are these reliable? Are the images or graphs relevant to the text?
 - Analyse the images: are the images credited and captioned? Do a Google reverse image search for any of the images.³¹
 - How does the image make you feel? Is it shocking? Enraging? Enlightening? Surprising? Hilarious? If the image triggers a strong emotional reaction, it may impair your evaluation skills. Be extra careful about the images' accuracy. Pay attention to what surprises you, as it may be a sign that you need to search for additional context.
- ▶ **Students can use this model to go through the process for another topic and/or website.**

Reflection (5–10 minutes)



To conclude, let's discuss the importance of understanding perspectives and credibility of sources. Why is it important to evaluate the website before reading the content? [Most sources present a specific point of view, not all authors or sources provide accurate or reliable information, there is a high likelihood that content is meant to manipulate the consumer on the internet.]



How can you respond when you see information that is intended to deceive the consumer?

29 In an academic disciplinary approach, scholars follow professional rules so that even while opinions and interpretations may vary significantly, there will not be the lies, half-truths, mistranslations, deliberate distortions and omissions that we find in the work of deniers. Academic experts provide authority and are often peer reviewed. This point is also relevant for the discussion about content and citing sources in the next question.

30 Cited sources may raise some tricky comments or examples, as many Holocaust denial sites give the appearance of academic rigour, but they are often citing other Holocaust deniers and pseudo-scholarly work. This is a good opportunity to reinforce the need to evaluate cited sources as well.

31 For instructions on how to do a reverse image search, please see <https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/1325808?hl=en&co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop>

Suggested additional activity

As follow-up activity or homework, students might apply the skills they've learned by writing a newspaper article about a Holocaust survivor or an aspect of Holocaust history, identifying the sources they choose to cite and why. The latter is the critical piece to demonstrate application of the lesson.

Additional resources

UNESCO has additional resources that offer further activity options in Media and information literate citizens: think critically, click wisely! (second edition of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy for Educators and Learners).³²

- Media and information literacy curriculum – specifically modules 9 and 11, <https://www.unesco.org/mil4teachers/en/curriculum>

³² <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377068>

Lesson 3.

Evaluating media about the Holocaust

Rationale:

Many of us search the internet for quick answers to a range of questions – including research topics. This session is intended to provide skills to evaluate information that surfaces from these internet searches. This is particularly important for content related to the Holocaust, because of the rise in Holocaust denial and distortion. This lesson focuses on the source information, and how it impacts our understanding and interpretation of the information.

Learning objectives:

- To analyse a source's provenance and authenticity (who, where, when, why) before evaluating the content (what).

Subjects: social studies, history

Skills: media and information literacy, historical literacy, critical thinking

Target learners: high school, ages 14–18

Time needed: 45 minutes

Required: computer and internet access

Notes to educators:

- Most activity questions include responses in brackets, except opinion questions. The responses are not comprehensive but offer a range of possible answers. Educators are encouraged to allow students to answer the questions first and only then to use the provided responses to supplement student responses.
- The microphone icon indicates what should be said aloud. The arrow indicates guidance for the educator.
- The introduction exercise focuses on social media posts and the activity focuses on news articles.

Trigger warning: Some of the posts contain graphic images.

Introduction (5–20 minutes)



In order to draw a judgment about a historical source, you need to have finished analysing it. This will enable you to detect the purpose and implicit perspectives of the author and the source, and possible errors, contradictions or omissions. You can use the findings of your analysis to come to a conclusion about its usefulness, accuracy, and reliability.

This introductory exercise uses two social media posts for the educator to model the approach to analysing sources.³³

Video from @holocaustmuseum:

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/C2IDfwdOlbz/>

- Who published/posted the content? [The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.]
- Where did they publish/post? [Instagram (and other social media).]
- When did they publish/post? [26 January 2024.]
- Why did they publish/post? [To educate about the Holocaust. It was posted around International Holocaust Remembrance Day to highlight the hatred that Jewish children experienced during the Holocaust through the testimony of a Holocaust survivor. To establish the contemporary relevance of this history, and to strengthen resistance to antisemitism today.]
- Who is the intended audience? [The general public.]

Video of Montana Tucker's visit to Poland:

<https://www.tiktok.com/@montanatucker/video/7161525073256500526>

- Who published/posted the content? [Montana Tucker, influencer.]
- Where did they publish/post? [TikTok.]
- When did they publish/post? [2 November 2022]
- Why did they publish/post? [To raise awareness about antisemitism.]
- Who is the intended audience? [Young adults.]

³³ This can also be done individually or in small groups. If so, these two examples can be options for the main activity.



Now, consider how language, images, and sources are being used.³⁴

- How does the type of source affect the way you understand the information? [Social media posts tend to be short so there may be limited context and/or content, whereas an article may be more likely to provide additional information. As social media posts tend to be short, a viewer's background knowledge may impact how much they learn and/or are willing to engage with the content.]
- What point of view does each source present? [USHMM – Holocaust survivor testimony directed to the viewer; Montana Tucker – personal experience, more conversational. They are both appealing to the viewer's humanity and emotional response to the content.]
- How are historical images used here? [In both, the historical images evoke the history of the location being described or discussed in order to help historically and visually contextualize the words.]
- What perspective does each source present? [USHMM – A Holocaust memorial institution that educates about the Holocaust; Montana Tucker – an influencer who, among other topics, raises awareness about Jewish history and culture from her personal perspective.]
- What might be some challenges to viewing an individual's account versus one from an institution? [An individual may have a strong bias and reflect one person's perspective.]
- Which one would you be more likely to see on your social media? Why?
- If you saw these posts on social media, would you 'like' either of them? Would you repost either of them? Why?

Activity (20 minutes)

- ▶ **Students can apply the introductory exercise to news articles to understand the evaluation process through another medium.**

Part I:

Evaluating media: determine the basic information about the source

Answer the following questions about this source:

- Who published/posted the content? What do we know about the source?

³⁴ This part can be in any format depending on educator and class goals: a large group discussion, in small groups, in writing, etc.

- Where did they publish/post?
- When did they publish/post?
- Why did they publish/post?
- Who is the intended audience?

Part II:

Detecting a point of view: analyse different components that may impact your understanding of the purpose and perspectives and credibility of each source

- **Headlines:** what words stand out? What information is shared? Is this clickbait?
- **Language:** what type of language is being used? Is it inflammatory or emotional, intended to produce a specific response? What feelings does the language try to evoke? Why is it important to recognize the emotions it is aiming to evoke?
- **Images:** what catches your eye in the picture? What questions arise when looking at the image? How are images being used? (Consider categories such as emotions, facts, illustration, evidence.) How are they cited? What do the images add to the article?
- **Viewpoints:** what perspectives are offered? How does this impact your understanding of the content?

Reflection (10 minutes)

- ▶ **Discuss how to think critically about source information, and how this information impacts our content consumption and creation, especially online.**

Possible questions to consider:

- How does evaluating the source impact how we consume the information it shares? [This will tell you if the source is reliable and credible to help inform how you evaluate the content.]
- What did you learn from this activity that you will consider when you encounter or seek out information? Or when you create media content?

Optional: One way to respond to Holocaust distortion is by educating through survivor stories.³⁵ To conclude, read the article³⁶ or watch a clip of Lily Ebert, a Holocaust survivor who shared her testimony through TikTok videos with her grandson Dov Forman.

Suggested additional activities

This lesson focuses on evaluating the source of information and detecting bias. Educators can add another layer to the activity by posing questions related to evaluating the content itself: what is depicted? What is the message? Who is the intended audience? What is the (intended) impact of the information?

Choose another post or article for students to apply the skills they learned in part 2, or have them create content through which they can apply the skills.

Additional resources

UNESCO has additional resources that offer further activity options through Media and information literate citizens: think critically, click wisely! (Second edition of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy for Educators and Learners):

- Media and information literacy curriculum – specifically modules 4, 6 and 7. <https://www.unesco.org/mil4teachers/en/curriculum?hub=750>
- Fully audio-based MOOC: Think Critically, Click Wisely: Media and Information Literacy in the next normal. <https://www.unesco.org/mil4teachers/en/moocs?hub=750>
- Podcasts on media and information literacy linked to mis-/disinformation and hate speech. <https://www.unesco.org/en/podcasts/media-information-literacy?hub=750>

35 While there are arguments about the fallibility of memory that challenge the use of testimony as evidence, survivor testimony is a key resource to convey the human impact of the Holocaust. Seeing and sensing the impact on one individual is a powerful tool to combat Holocaust distortion.

36 <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/survivor-and-her-family-stand-strong-against-holocaust-denial-and-distortion>

Lesson 4.

Boundaries of meme culture:
Holocaust memes

Rationale:

People, especially young people, encounter memes across social media platforms without necessarily recognizing or understanding the underlying meaning behind them. Young people need to better understand the challenges of interpreting memes and how problematic memes might affect us.

Learning objectives:

- To evaluate the use of memes for messaging.
- To consider how, when, and in what format it is appropriate to share content online.

Subjects: history, technology, global citizenship

Skills: media literacy, historical literacy, empathy building, digital citizenship, respect for human dignity

Target learners: high school, ages 14–18

Time needed: 30–40 minutes

Required: printed materials or computer and internet access

Notes to educators:

- Most activity questions include responses in brackets, except for opinion questions. The responses are not comprehensive but offer a range of possible answers. Educators are encouraged to allow students to answer the questions first and only then to use the provided responses to supplement student responses.
- The microphone icon indicates what should be said aloud. The arrow indicates guidance for the educator.
- This lesson includes examples, but educators may also select other examples. Given the nature of memes – specifically, that they can be intended or come across as jokes and simultaneously be offensive – it is necessary to unpack the examples clearly. Take care to establish who or what is the target, who or what is being made fun of, and what the intention may be.

Warning: This activity includes offensive content.

Introduction (10–15 minutes)



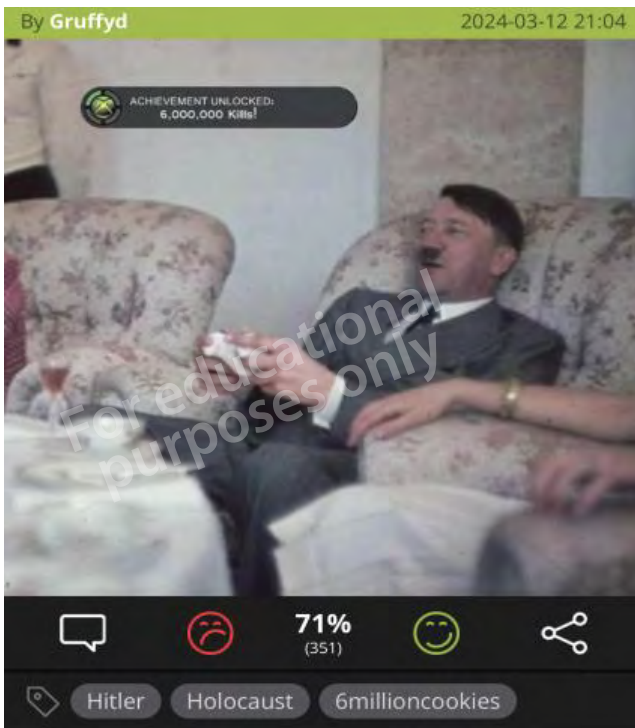
This lesson focuses on memes. Let's begin by defining the term. What is a meme? Where have you seen them?

[A humorous image, video, piece of text, or GIF that is repurposed and spread very quickly online, typically on social media platforms, often for the purpose of social, cultural, or political commentary.]



This lesson will explore memes about the Holocaust and challenge us to reflect on what memes are appropriate and which are not. We will do a group example together.

- ▶ The educator can demonstrate the activity using this example.



Source: Screenshot from Memedroid.*

This is a fabricated image found on the internet.

- What is being depicted? [Hitler playing a video game with text indicating that he reached 6 million 'kills']
- Who created this? [A user called Gruffyd.]
- What is the message? [Hitler killed 6 million Jews in a video game. It can be interpreted in different ways: as dark humour glorifying or celebrating the Holocaust; possibly that the Holocaust was a game to Hitler; or 'achievement unlocked' can refer to a goal that has been accomplished, so in this case that it is a joke that the Holocaust was easy for Hitler.]

- Is the content true and reliable? [No. Video games did not exist when Hitler was alive and the photo is clearly manipulated.]
- How does the format impact our understanding of the message? [Many memes are intended as a joke (and as such give those who produce and recycle them ‘plausible deniability’ to accusations of antisemitism), but this is an example of trivializing the Holocaust and is offensive to the memory of the victims. The meme format requires viewers to apply their understanding of cultural references – in this case video game terminology – to interpret the meme.]
- Who is the intended audience? [Social media users.]
- Why was this created/what is the purpose here? [Unknown, but it may be as a joke or with malicious intent.]
 - [Follow up question: why would someone make a joke about something as serious as the Holocaust?]
- How popular is this meme? Why does this matter? [351 user responses on the image, with 71% considering this a funny meme. This matters, because this means it has been viewed by many people, very likely more than just the number of people who responded to the image. The number of people interacting with the image indicates how much exposure this example of Holocaust distortion received.]
- If you saw this online, how would you respond? Why? Would you ‘like’ the meme – why or why not? Would you repost the meme – why or why not?³⁷

Activity (10–20 minutes)

- ▶ Consider the impact that sharing these memes would have.

Reflection (5–10 minutes)

- ▶ Consider the impact that sharing these memes would have.



Now that we’ve reviewed some examples of memes, do you think differently about them? What is the effect of sharing these types of memes?

- Additional questions: If you know content is inaccurate or unreliable or offensive, how would you approach the meme? What are possible responses?

³⁷ This is an opportunity to foster digital citizenship. Responses may include replying with condemnation or calling it out, but this runs the risk of amplifying the original post. Is it better to ignore it, or to report it, or something else? Depending on students’ ages, their experience with memes, and their understanding of social media platforms, they may need additional information about the implications of these options in order to have an informed discussion.

What are the dangers of sharing content that you know is misleading or inaccurate? [Offensive to the memory of the victims, and it may distort people's view of the Holocaust or fuel antisemitic prejudice.]

- ▶ **One way to respond to Holocaust distortion is by using survivor stories to educate. To conclude, read the article³⁸ or watch a clip of Lily Ebert, a Holocaust survivor who shared her testimony through TikTok videos. As a discussion or separate assignment, students should reflect on the power of seeing or reading about one person's experience of the Holocaust.**

38 <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/survivor-and-her-family-stand-strong-against-holocaust-denial-and-distortion>

Lesson 5.

The age of AI: how to discern
what is real and what is not

Rationale:

In the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI), we need to ask ourselves if the images and text we see and read online are authentic. Are they real? People create and consume AI-generated content for educational and entertainment purposes. The two activities in this session offer examples of how to evaluate content, both when creating it and when consuming it.

Learning objectives:

- To reflect on the uses of generative AI, and the ethics of using AI to generate content about the Holocaust.
- To recognize and evaluate content generated by AI.

Subjects: technology, literature

Skills: media and information literacy, digital citizenship, critical thinking

Target learners: high school, ages 14–18

Time needed: 30–40 minutes

Required: printed materials or computer and internet access

Notes to educators:

- Most activity questions include responses in brackets, except opinion questions. The responses are not comprehensive but offer a range of possible answers. Educators are encouraged to allow students to answer the questions first and only then to use the provided responses to supplement student responses.
- The microphone icon indicates what should be said aloud. The arrow indicates guidance for the educator.
- The examples provided in this lesson are meant to build skills in detecting and evaluating AI-generated content. For a more in-depth example and discussion, please see the suggested additional activity at the end of the lesson.
- The second activity works well for students who have read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and/or are familiar with her story.
- For more information, please see UNESCO's publication *AI and the Holocaust: rewriting history? The impact of artificial intelligence on understanding the Holocaust*.³⁹

³⁹ <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/ai-and-holocaust-rewriting-history-impact-artificial-intelligence-understanding-holocaust>

Introduction (3–5 minutes)



Today's lesson will focus on how we consume and create information in the age of artificial intelligence (AI). To ensure we all have a common understanding of this concept, let's define the term artificial intelligence. To what does artificial intelligence refer? [Artificial Intelligence refers to 'technology that enables computers and digital devices to learn, read, write, create and analyse'.⁴⁰]



One AI platform is ChatGPT, which allows users to request generated content with specified length, tone, style, language, etc. In the age of AI, we need to ask ourselves if the images and text we see and read online are authentic. Are they real? People create and consume AI-generated content for educational as well as entertainment purposes. The two activities below offer examples of how to evaluate content, both when one is creating it and when one is consuming it.

Activity (20–30 minutes:

Part I: 10–15 minutes; Part II: 10–15 minutes)

PART I

- ▶ In this first activity, students will review and analyse the AI response to a question they have generated. Students are taking on the role of creators of content.

Option1

- ▶ For educators with access to computers and an internet connection: as a large group⁴¹, open ChatGPT in a private browser and conduct the exercise on a topic of the educator's or students' choosing.⁴²

⁴⁰ <https://www.ibm.com/topics/artificial-intelligence>

⁴¹ This is the recommended format as there may be school restrictions on student use of this platform. It is recommended that students should not generate their own prompts or articles unless the school permits it and students are above the age 13.

⁴² It is recommended to use a 'New Private Window' or 'New Incognito Window' search page, because using a standard browser window allows sites to record past searches. If a user repeatedly searches for Holocaust-denying content, the algorithm will prioritize related links in future searches, potentially leading the user into an ideological echo chamber. Browsing in a private window prevents the browser from storing this search history, reducing the risk of being influenced by biased or extremist content.



As a class, we will pose a question on a search browser in a 'New Private Window,' because using a standard browser window allows sites to record past searches.



Let's pose a question or input a prompt about Holocaust history or a related topic and wait for the AI response.⁴³ The AI answer will be the basis of this activity.

▶ **Students should consider the following:**

- What information is included?
- What information is missing and should be included?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What context is necessary to understand this information?
- How reliable and credible is the text? How do you know this? What does it tell you about the text?
- How can you verify and corroborate the information? Should we use information that cannot be verified or corroborated? What are the risks?
- Where the prompt generates a response from a person's perspective, such as a survivor, victim or perpetrator: if the text seems fairly accurate, does it matter if this was written by AI rather than a real person? Why or why not?

Option2

- ▶ **If it is preferable to use an example prepared earlier, please see the prompt and ChatGPT response in the worksheet below.**

**Please note this was AI generated for educational purposes only.
Do not duplicate or use it for any other purposes.**

⁴³ In some countries, search engines produce AI-generated responses when a question is typed in the search bar. If that is a feature in your location, you can also do the activity through a general search engine rather than through ChatGPT.



Using the worksheet on page 51, consider the following questions:

- What information is included? [Key biographical information about Joseph Goebbels, key aspects of his role and influence.]
- What information do you think is missing and should be included? [There are no sources cited and in this case there is no image accompanying the text.]
- Who is the intended audience? [Students determine this as they may have posed the question. It depends on who is using ChatGPT and for what purpose.]
- What context is necessary to understand this information? [It is necessary to confirm Goebbels' biography and his role in the Nazi Party.]
- How reliable and credible is the text? How do you know this? What does it tell you about the text? [The text provides an overview with general information about Joseph Goebbels. It is difficult for non-experts to classify this text as reliable and credible as it does not reference any sources. The information needs to be verified. There are a few details that need to be checked (for example, the date of his suicide is incorrect and how his children were killed has not been fully established⁴⁴) and this can be done by examining other sources.]
- How can you verify and corroborate the AI-generated information? What are the challenges? [Additional research about Joseph Goebbels using trusted sites for both general overviews and for the details. If the reader does not have sufficient knowledge about the subject matter, they might not know which information needs checking. Verifying information takes time and internet research skills.]
- What else do you know about the limitations of ChatGPT that might make you cautious to use it to find information? [For example, AI has been found to invent or 'hallucinate' information, including about the Holocaust.]

PART II

- ▶ **In this second activity, students will review a text and assess whether it has been generated by AI. Students are taking on the role of consumers of content.**
- ▶ **In this activity, students will read an AI-generated diary entry alleged written by Anne Frank. They will analyse the text to learn what questions to ask when reviewing a source, and to identify how they know the entry is AI generated. The text and answer key are provided in the worksheet below.**

⁴⁴ <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/murder-in-hitler-s-bunker-who-really-poisoned-the-goebbels-children-a-653981.html>



We will now analyse diary entry allegedly written by Anne Frank, to identify how we know the letter is AI generated.

- ▶ **Students can annotate a printed copy of the text or, if they have computer and internet access, they can make notes on a Google Doc or Word document.**



Using the worksheet on pages 52-3, consider the following questions:

- What information is included? [Emotions, heat, hunger, curiosity about and hope for the future.]
- What information do you think is missing and should be included? [There is nothing obvious missing.]
- Who is the intended audience? [The public, as Anne was hoping to publish her diaries after the Holocaust.]
- What context is necessary to understand this information? [Anne Frank's story and her diary, information about the experience of Jews in the occupied Netherlands.]
- How reliable and credible is the text? How do you know this? What does it tell you about the text? [There are a few clues to challenge the reliability and credibility of this entry. Most significantly, the date of the entry is after Anne and her family were discovered and deported. On 12 August 1944, Anne Frank was in Westerbork and not writing in her diary. The other clues have to do with language – Kitty, Mother and Father. Anne called her diary Kitty so it is implausible that she would write 'Dear Diary'. Yet, overall, the content, language and feelings feel real and authentic.]
- How can you verify and corroborate the information? [Confirm the timeline of the Frank family in the Annexe and when they were ultimately discovered and deported.]
- If a text seems fairly accurate, does it matter if this was written by AI rather than a survivor or victim? Why or why not? [Yes, because it challenges what is considered authentic evidence of the Holocaust. The purpose of the piece should be explicit, so that readers can evaluate the source correctly.]

Reflection (5–10 minutes)



Consider why it is important to be able to recognize AI-generated content and know how to respond to it. What are the benefits of AI-generated content? What are the challenges? What are the dangers of creating and consuming inaccurate AI-generated content?

Suggested additional activity

Students can search for reputable sources that verify or refute the content in the text. They can look up the passage in Anne Frank's diary, or check Otto Frank's testimony⁴⁵ to confirm the timeline.

Additional resources

Modules 11 and 13 about media and information literacy and AI in the UNESCO resource **Media and information literate citizens: think critically, click wisely!** (Second edition of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy for Educators and Learners), offer many other related activities that educators and trainers can adapt.

- Media and Information Literacy Curriculum – E-version, <https://www.unesco.org/mil4teachers/en/curriculum?hub=750>

The UNESCO AI Competency Framework for Students aims to help educators to integrate AI learning objectives into official school curricula is crucial for students globally to engage with AI safely and meaningfully.

- AI competency framework for students. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/ai-competency-framework-students>

Reminders/caveats

- Students should not generate their own prompts or articles unless the school permits it and students are older than 13.
- Students should not put any personal or identifying information into the AI tool, because it collects that information.
- Use a private browser when using AI tools or prompting examples of Holocaust denial and distortion.

⁴⁵ <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn713439>

WORKSHEET: The age of AI: how to discern what is real and what is not

PART I

NOTE: This entry is AI generated.

Prompt: Who was Joseph Goebbels?

ChatGPT response:

'Joseph Goebbels was a high-ranking Nazi official who served as the Minister of Propaganda in Adolf Hitler's regime. Born on October 29, 1897, in Rheydt, Germany, Goebbels was a key figure in shaping and disseminating the Nazi ideology.

Key aspects of his role and influence include:

- 1. Propaganda Machine:** Goebbels was responsible for controlling and directing the Nazi propaganda machine. He used his position to spread anti-Semitic, nationalist, and militaristic messages through various media, including newspapers, films, and radio broadcasts. His propaganda played a crucial role in fostering support for the Nazi regime and its policies.
 - 2. Antisemitism and Racism:** Goebbels was a fervent anti-Semite and used his influence to promote and justify the persecution and extermination of Jews. His propaganda was instrumental in shaping public opinion to support the Nazis' racist and genocidal policies.
 - 3. Oratory and Rhetoric:** Known for his powerful oratory skills, Goebbels was a charismatic speaker who could stir emotions and rally support for the Nazi cause. His speeches and writings were designed to incite hatred and bolster the regime's control over German society.
 - 4. Role in World War II:** During World War II, Goebbels continued to use propaganda to maintain morale on the home front and to promote the Nazi war effort. As the war turned against Germany, he intensified efforts to mobilize the population and justify the ongoing conflict.
 - 5. Final Days:** As the Allies closed in on Berlin in 1945, Goebbels remained loyal to Hitler. On April 30, 1945, the same day as Hitler's suicide, Goebbels and his wife, Magda, poisoned their six children and then committed suicide in the Reich Chancellery bunker.
- Goebbels' role in the Nazi regime highlights the power of propaganda in shaping political and social realities, and his legacy is a stark reminder of the destructive potential of state-controlled media and ideological manipulation.'

PART II

NOTE: This entry is AI generated.

Prompt (for reference)⁴⁶: Please write a fifteen-sentence diary entry in the voice of Anne Frank.

ChatGPT response:

August 12, 1944

Dear Diary,

Today was another one of those endless days that seem to drag on forever. The heat is almost unbearable, and the sun beats down mercilessly on our hiding place. I tried to keep my spirits up by writing, but it's hard to concentrate with all the worry and fear that fills the air.

We had a small argument this morning between Mother and Father. It was about the rationing of food and how little we have left. I can't help but feel guilty for the tension, but I know it's not my fault. The tension seems to seep into every corner of our lives, making everything more difficult.

The only thing that brings me solace is my writing. When I put my thoughts on paper, I feel as though I'm speaking to a friend who truly understands me. My diary has become my closest confidante, a safe place where I can express my dreams, fears, and frustrations.

Pim has been especially quiet lately, and I worry about him. It seems as though the pressure of our situation is wearing him down. Even though he tries to remain strong, I can see the strain in his eyes.

I often wonder what life will be like when this terrible war is finally over. Will we ever be able to return to our old lives, or will everything have changed beyond recognition? I dream of the day when we can walk outside without fear and laugh together as a family again.

For now, all we can do is wait and hope for better days. As I write these words, I remind myself that hope is what keeps us going. I cling to the belief that, someday, peace will come and we will be able to live freely once more.

Yours truly,

Anne

⁴⁶ Educators do not need to provide the prompt, though they should know what the prompt was for the purposes of this activity.

ANNOTATED COPY

This date is after Anne and her family were discovered and deported from Amsterdam. On this date, Anne was in Westerbork transit camp.

August 12, 1944

Dear Diary,

Anne addressed her entries to Kitty.

Today was another one of those endless days that seem to drag on forever. The heat is almost unbearable, and the sun beats down mercilessly on our hiding place. I tried to keep my spirits up by writing, but it's hard to concentrate with all the worry and fear that fills the air.

Anne typically wrote Mummy and Daddy when referring to her parents.

We had a small argument this morning between Mother and Father. It was about the rationing of food and how little we have left. I can't help but feel guilty for the tension, but I know it's not my fault. The tension seems to seep into every corner of our lives, making everything more difficult.

The only thing that brings me solace is my writing. When I put my thoughts on paper, I feel as though I'm speaking to a friend who truly understands me. My diary has become my closest confidante, a safe place where I can express my dreams, fears, and frustrations.

Pim has been especially quiet lately, and I worry about him. It seems as though the pressure of our situation is wearing him down. Even though he tries to remain strong, I can see the strain in his eyes.

I often wonder what life will be like when this terrible war is finally over. Will we ever be able to return to our old lives, or will everything have changed beyond recognition? I dream of the day when we can walk outside without fear and laugh together as a family again.

For now, all we can do is wait and hope for better days. As I write these words, I remind myself that hope is what keeps us going. I cling to the belief that, someday, peace will come and we will be able to live freely once more.

Yours truly,

Anne

Lesson 6.

Looking at multiple angles:
understanding different
perspectives

Rationale:

Where do students get their news or information? What role does social media play for students? This activity examines how social media trends can blur the lines between appropriate and inappropriate uses of history and memory.

Learning objectives:

- To explore how people frame events differently because of factors including biases, perspective and context.
- To study content from multiple perspectives in order to better understand them through nuance and complexity.

Skills: media and information literacy, digital citizenship, critical thinking, empathy building

Subjects: technology, citizenship education, computer and media studies, history education

Target learners: high school, ages 14–18

Time needed: 35–45 minutes

Required: printed materials

Notes to educators:

- Most activity questions include responses in brackets, except opinion questions. The responses are not comprehensive but offer a range of possible answers. Educators are encouraged to allow students to answer the questions first and only then to use the provided responses to supplement student responses.
- The microphone icon indicates what should be said aloud. The arrow indicates guidance for the educator.

Introduction (3–5 minutes)




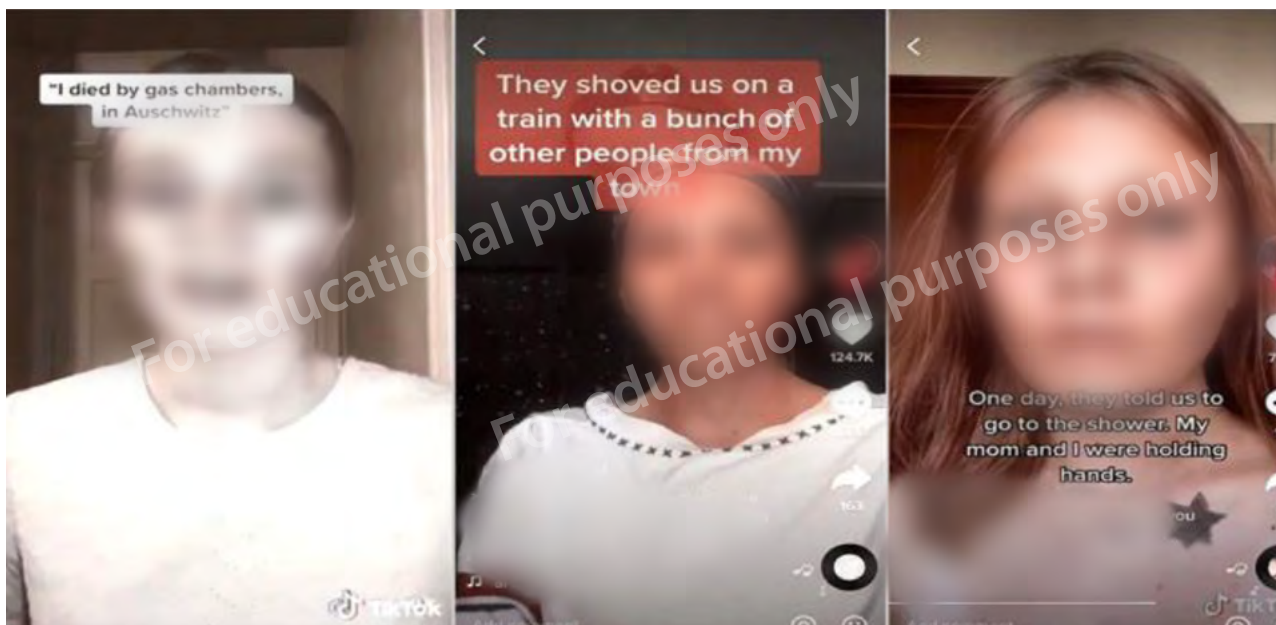
This lesson will focus on our use of social media. Where do you get your news or information? What role does social media play for you? Have you ever created or posted any social media content about history? If so, how did you decide what information to include? What was the response from other social media users? (Likes, shares, comments, etc.)

 We will examine how social media trends can blur the lines between appropriate and inappropriate uses of history and memory.

**Activity (20–30 minutes: Part I: 10–20 minutes;
Part II: 5–10 minutes)**

PART I

 We're going to examine screenshots of a TikTok trend called #holocaustchallenge, where users recorded videos pretending to be Holocaust victims murdered during the Holocaust.



Source: (Screenshot) TikTok #holocaustchallenge.*⁴⁷

 Consider the following questions:

- What are your initial reactions?
- What might the young people have been trying to achieve? Why might these young people be pretending to be Holocaust victims?
- Why may some people find these videos uncomfortable?
- If you scrolled onto this on TikTok, how would you react?

⁴⁷ Please note that UNESCO has blurred their faces because they are minors.



There have been a range of responses. You will now take a look at three different responses to this trend and consider how they each view the trend and its impact.

'Most creators are doing [these videos] to hop onto a trend so they can get likes and exposure [but they are] ill informed and woefully ignorant ... These kinds of trends are so normalized these days, there's also a level of shock value content which I think is outdated and in bad taste. This shock value further desensitizes viewers to this type of behaviour and normalizes this type of harmful content ... People need to be properly taught about the Holocaust, not make it into a disgusting trend. Our obsession with trauma porn has only motivated a desire to dramatise these narratives ... It can be very triggering for people who have family that either survived or was lost in the war.'

Briana on Twitter⁴⁸

The 'victims' trend of TikTok can be hurtful & offensive. Some videos are dangerously close or already beyond the border of trivialization of history.

But we should discuss this not to shame & attack young people whose motivation seem very diverse. It's an educational challenge. pic.twitter.com/UC7IM6gudj — Auschwitz Memorial (@AuschwitzMuseum) August 31, 2020⁴⁹

McKayla, 15, from Florida, says she made her video to 'spread awareness' of the Holocaust, and to share her ancestor's story with the genocide.

'I'm very motivated and captivated by the Holocaust and the history of World War II,' she says. 'I have ancestors who were in concentration camps, and have actually met a few survivors from Auschwitz camp. I wanted to spread awareness and share out to everyone the reality behind the camps by sharing my Jewish grandmother's story.'⁵⁰

'Students should feel with the survivors of mass violence and recognise the emotions they are conveying (fear, anger). But they should recognise and imagine those experiences from the perspective of the other person.'

48 <https://romea.cz/en/world/holocaust-survivors-and-remembrance-organizations-object-to-how-younger-generation-is-using-tiktok-to-commemorate-victims>

49 <https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/digitalholocaustmemory/2020/09/10/tiktok-holocaustchallenge/>

50 <https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/digitalholocaustmemory/2020/09/10/tiktok-holocaustchallenge/>

They should try to understand what it was like for “them”, not what would it have been like for “me”. This kind of engagement requires critical distance, which is rarely achieved through simplistic roleplaying.⁵¹

Source: Sara Jones, Professor of Modern Languages and German Studies, University of Birmingham, in her article TikTok Holocaust trend shows that we need to teach the ethics of remembrance.⁵²



Consider the following questions:

- What are the different perspectives presented in these responses to the TikTok trend? [The first strongly criticizes users who minimize the importance of studying the Holocaust in order to jump on a trend, and highlights the impact this type of minimization of the Holocaust may have on people who have direct connections to this history. The second one finds this trend offensive because it can be seen as trivializing the history of the Holocaust. The third shares a motivation that one user had to share her grandmother’s experience during the Holocaust. The fourth raises the importance of learning to empathize with victims of mass violence without role-playing.]
- Which do you find most compelling? Why?
- How do you think the original posters may have felt about these responses?
- What is Professor Jones referring to with the term ‘ethics of remembrance’?
- What are possible ways to respond to this type of post or trend?

Part II



It is important to hear from Holocaust survivors themselves, too. TikTok can also be a platform for survivors to share their testimony.

- ▶ **Examples are Lily Ebert and Tova Friedman (you can watch a brief video about Tova’s story here⁵³), who found it meaningful to share their stories in this format. However, there are also survivors such as Gidon Lev, who left TikTok due to unchecked antisemitism.⁵⁴**



What are your reactions to these survivor videos? How do you compare the different uses of TikTok for talking about the Holocaust?

51 Please see IHRA’s Recommendation for Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust 3.2.7: Exercise caution when using simulations and role-play. An explanation can be found here: <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/recommendations-teaching-learning-holocaust>

52 <https://theconversation.com/tiktok-holocaust-trend-shows-that-we-need-to-teach-the-ethics-of-remembrance-145640>

53 <https://apnews.com/article/holocaust-survivor-tiktok-auschwitz-b9be32a968038ee6922282fc65acd348>

54 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/holocaust-survivor-quits-tiktok-cites-failure-to-confront-antisemitism/>

Reflection (10 minutes)

- ▶ To finish up, have students reflect on what they learned from this activity about creating and consuming content online.



To conclude, write some guidance for other young people on creating a social media video about the Holocaust (i.e. ethics, accuracy, engaging). Consider: are there more sensitive ways you could generate awareness of the Holocaust online?

- ▶ For those using technology, this is an opportunity to discuss algorithms on social media platforms and the need to seek out additional sources.

Suggested additional activity

- Students could read Holocaust remembrance on TikTok, an article that discusses how TikTok is being used to raise awareness of the Holocaust among young people.⁵⁵
- After writing their guidelines, students could create videos that follow their own ethical guidance and submit them to the educator. Perhaps have them create videos about the life of a survivor they know or have researched.
 - Guidance for educators: This activity should be designed clearly with parameters and oversight, as TikTok may not be the right platform for this type of video. The videos students create may not be suitable to be uploaded to online platforms, but they can serve as a helpful exercise.
- Split students into groups based on the different perspectives and have them debate the issue.

55 <https://www.dw.com/en/bringing-holocaust-remembrance-to-tiktok/a-64519255>

Lesson 7.

The historical record:
examining evidence
from the Holocaust

Rationale:

In order to identify and tackle Holocaust denial and distortion, it is important to better understand the value of different sources and the evidence they provide. This session encourages students to understand the importance of primary sources as evidence by examining some historical examples.

Learning objectives:

- To encourage the examination of primary sources and documents.
- To understand how we know what we know about the past.
- To understand the importance of primary sources as evidence.
- To analyse various types of primary sources as evidence.

Subjects: social studies, history

Skills: historical literacy, critical thinking

Target learners: high school, ages 14–18

Time needed: 45–60 minutes

Required: printed materials and/or computer and internet access

Notes to educators:

- Most of the activity questions include responses in brackets, except opinion questions. The responses are not comprehensive but offer a range of possible answers. Educators are encouraged to allow students to answer the questions first and only then to use the provided responses to supplement student responses.
- The microphone icon indicates what should be said aloud. The arrow indicates guidance for the educator.

Introduction (5–10 minutes)



One question historians ask is: ‘What documentation provides evidence of how and why an event happened?’ In this activity, we will think like historians by exploring examples of evidence that has contributed to what we know about the Holocaust and how we know it. These examples all provide evidence that the Holocaust was intentional. One way to fight Holocaust denial and distortion is to better understand the primary sources that serve as evidence of the Holocaust.

- ▶ **As a warm-up activity or discussion, students should answer the following questions about the Holocaust:**
 - What type of sources are needed to examine the Holocaust as a historical event? [These could include artefacts, written documents, photographs and witness testimony.]
 - What types of questions do we need to ask when analysing the sources? [Where and when is it from? Who created it? How was it discovered or collected? How does this source help us learn more about the historical event? Is it authentic? How do we prove it is authentic?]
 - What type of evidence can one find in these sources? [Facts about events; information about perpetrators, victims, witnesses; motivations and decision-making processes; emotional and physical impact of actions, witness testimony,⁵⁶ etc.]

Activity (20–40 minutes: Part I: 10–20 minutes on analysis of sources; 10–15 minutes on discussion; 5 minutes on Ben Ferencz’s testimony)



In this activity, we will examine several examples of historical evidence from the Holocaust.

- ▶ **When possible, it would be helpful to have students analyse the source and caption first, and then give them the additional information as a second layer. This allows students to think critically about analysing sources and evidence.**
- ▶ **The following questions will guide their analysis:**
 - What information does this source provide?
 - Who created or wrote the source?
 - When was the source created?
 - Where is the source from (geographically and, if relevant, from what site)?
 - Why was the source created?

56 See Footnote 37

- What information do you think is missing? Where might you find this missing information?
 - What evidence is presented in this source? How does this evidence help us better understand how and why the Holocaust happened?
 - What evidence is presented in this source? How does this evidence help us better understand how and why the Holocaust happened?
- ▶ **Once students have analysed and discussed all the sources of evidence from the activity, have them watch this clip of Ben Ferencz’s testimony.**



Benjamin Ferencz describes collecting evidence against alleged war criminals⁵⁷

Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.*



In this activity, Historical context: At the end of the Second World War and the Holocaust, the Allies (Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union and the United States) put top Nazi leaders on trial for their Holocaust crimes. These became known as the Nuremberg Trials, held in Nuremberg, Germany, from 1945. Nazi leaders were tried for crimes against peace, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and conspiracy to commit these crimes. Although the term genocide was coined in 1944, it did not become a legal crime until the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. These trials set new precedents for post-atrocity justice.⁵⁸ This testimony will highlight how and why the sources and evidence you have examined were used to hold Nazi perpetrators accountable for their crimes.

57 <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/oral-history/benjamin-beryl-ferencz-describes-collecting-evidence-against-alleged-war-criminals>

58 <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-nuremberg-trials>

- ▶ **Additional information: 'Ben was born in a small village in the Carpathian Mountains of Transylvania in Romania. When he was an infant, his family moved to the United States. Ben attended Harvard University, where he studied criminal law. Ben graduated from Harvard University Law School in 1943. He joined a US anti-aircraft artillery battalion that was training in preparation for an Allied invasion of western Europe. At the end of World War II in Europe, Ben was transferred to the war crimes investigation branch of the US Army. He was charged with gathering evidence against and apprehending alleged Nazi war criminals. He ultimately became chief US prosecutor in The Einsatzgruppen Case ('mobile killing squads') of the Subsequent Nuremberg Proceedings.'**⁵⁹

Transcript

'The office was the Third Army, Judge Advocate headquarters, which kept moving as the front kept moving up. It was either in Erlangen or it was in Munich or it was, uh, someplace else, and, you know, we had, usually took over a German Kaserne [barracks] and we had a room and a desk and a typewriter. So I would get back there with whatever notes I had, whatever documents I had, and write up a report. And, um, the reports would say: "On certain date U.S. army troops entered the camps of X"—let's assume Mauthausen, for example. "There the troops encountered the following scene: there were originally 50,000 inmates in the camp, there were 12,000 still alive, 10,000 had been marched out the day before. The camp officers were so-and-so. The crematoria were still going, there were so many bodies stacked in front of the crematoria. I took witness statements from 10 witnesses, they're attached as exhibits one to ten. Um, the suspected persons responsible for these crimes are so-and-so and so-and-so. Issue orders immediately to have them put on the CROWCASS list, the Central Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects. Have them distributed to all members of the U.S. Army, wherever any POWs are, compare them with this list, have them arrested, and report back to headquarters." So, the goal of my investigation was to describe what had happened, to collect credible evidence admissible in a court of law, which could be used to convict the persons responsible of a known crime under international law. That was the objective, and that's what we did.'

Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

59 <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/oral-history/benjamin-beryl-ferencz-describes-evidence-collected-at-the-mauthausen-camp>



Based on this clip of Ben Ferencz, why do you think it was important to collect evidence about the Holocaust in the immediate postwar context?

Reflection (10–15 minutes)



Despite the Nazis' active efforts to destroy evidence of their crimes towards the end of the war – such as attempts to blow up gas chambers and hide mass graves – the Holocaust is an incredibly well-documented case of genocide. Much of the documentation includes the bureaucratic evidence left by the Nazis.

- ▶ **To conclude, reflect on the following question:**
 - How do these sources and the evidence they provide contribute to the historical record of the Holocaust? [Together they document that the Holocaust happened. They provide information on the scope and scale of the murder of Jews, of perpetrator actions, and victim experiences.]

Suggested additional activity

As a discussion, activity or as homework, have students reflect on the following question: 'The Holocaust is an incredibly well documented case of genocide. How would we approach a historical event that does not have the same amount of evidence?'

Take students to a library or museum to explore evidence and/or ways to research evidence. When possible, it is preferable to visit a site where students can consult original archives. If those are not possible options, have students explore a digital archive such as the Arolsen Archives⁶⁰ or the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum collection.⁶¹

Using lists of victims and survivors, let students choose an individual to learn about to help personalize the history. Educators can encourage them to choose someone who lived in their town, city or region, to explore local history more in depth. Databases include the Yad Vashem Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names,⁶² the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Database of Holocaust Survivor and Victim Names,⁶³ and the Arolsen Archives.⁶⁴

60 <https://arolsen-archives.org/en/search-explore/search-online-archive/>; For more information about the Bad Arolsen Archives, please visit <https://arolsen-archives.org/en/about-us/who-we-are/>

61 <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/>; For more information about how the archive came to be, please visit <https://www.ushmm.org/collections/the-museums-collections/about/scope-and-nature-of-the-collections>

62 <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/names>

63 <https://www.ushmm.org/remember/resources-holocaust-survivors-victims/database-of-holocaust-survivor-and-victim-names>

64 <https://arolsen-archives.org/en/search-explore/search-online-archive/>

WORKSHEET: The historical record: examining evidence from the Holocaust



Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Thomas Wartenberg. This is [public domain material](#) produced by the government of Nazi Germany, 1942, and reproduced in US government archives.

Caption: Map Titled 'Jewish executions carried out by *Einsatzgruppen* A'. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.⁶⁵

'This map accompanied a secret undated German report on the mass murder of Jews by *Einsatzgruppen* A (mobile killing unit A). During the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, the map was introduced as evidence by both the American and British prosecution teams.'⁶⁶

Context: The *Einsatzgruppen*, also known as 'mobile killing squads,' were special SS units that operated behind the German army as it invaded and occupied countries in Europe. They are best known for conducting mass shootings in the Soviet Union. Approximately a third of all Jewish Holocaust victims were killed in these operations.⁶⁷

Answer the following questions about this source:

- What information does this source provide? [The number of Jews killed by *Einsatzgruppen* A, one of the mobile killing squads; the number of Jews remaining in each area; stamp that indicates this was an official report (hard to make out, but it translates as 'Secret Reich Matter').]
- Who created or wrote the source? [Those who oversaw the *Einsatzgruppen*.]

65 <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1177426>

66 <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/artifact/map-titled-jewish-executions-carried-out-by-einsatzgruppen-a>

67 For more information about *Einsatzgruppen*, please see <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/einsatzgruppen>

- When was the source created? [Undated; depending on students’ knowledge of Holocaust history, they may be able to deduce that the mobile killing squads operated in the Soviet Union after Operation Barbarossa, beginning in June 1941.]
- Where is the source from (geographically and, if relevant, from what site)? [The map depicts the Baltic states and modern Belarus;⁶⁸ the map is now part of the National Archives and Records Administration in the United States of America.]
- Why was the source created? [As part of a secret Nazi report on the mass murder of Jews by *Einsatzgruppen A*.⁶⁹]
- What information do you think is missing? In what sources might you find this missing information? [This map does not provide information about the individuals who were murdered or the total number of Jews in each country before the mass murders took place (only how many were murdered). This information can be found in other Nazi documents, such as deportation lists, and in photos and testimony from people who lived in the same place.]
- What evidence is presented in this source? How does this evidence help us better understand how and why the Holocaust happened? [Albeit a snapshot of the total number of victims, this is evidence that there were mass killings of Jews in Nazi-occupied territories; it also highlights the bureaucratic nature of the genocide that was deemed necessary to systematically and completely destroy European Jewry. There are many other sources like this one that provide similar evidence.]



Caption: Listing of Jews for deportation to Riga, Latvia. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, gift of Beno Helmer⁷⁰.

‘The SS compiled lists of Jews who were to be deported to ghettos, concentration camps, and killing centers. This document provides the names, birthdates, marital status, and addresses of Jews who were “evacuated” on November 20, 1941 from Germany to the Riga ghetto in German-occupied Latvia.’

Source: Deportation List, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.*

68 Depending on students’ geographic knowledge, the city names may be more helpful clues to context.

69 For more information on the Einsatzgruppen sources, please see Holocaust Denial on Trial’s ‘Einsatzgruppen: Reliability of Figures in Reports.’ <https://www.hdot.org/debunking-denial/ezg4-reliability-reports/>

70 <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/document/listing-of-jews-for-deportation-to-riga-latvia>

Answer the following questions about this piece of evidence:

- What information does this source provide? [A list of Jews being deported to Riga, Latvia (term used is 'evacuation'). It includes names, birthdates, marital status, and addresses.]
- Who created or wrote the source? [The SS. We know this because the SS were responsible for 'The Final Solution' and deportations of Jews to camps and killing centres.⁷¹]
- When was the source created? [Probably in November 1941, because it was used for a deportation on 20 November 1941.]
- Where is the source from (geographically and, if relevant, from what site)? [Riga, Latvia; held in the collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.]
- Why was the source created? [To document the list of Jews who were deported for Nazi records, to ensure the records accounted for those who were deported, or perhaps even for functionaries to prove their success to SS superiors.]
- What information do you think is missing? In what sources might you find this missing information? [This source does not provide the identities of specific perpetrators overseeing the deportation, and this page does not include from where these Jews were being deported. This information may be found on other lists, documentation about the places from which Jews were deported to Riga, Latvia, or survivor and victim documents about these specific people.]
- What evidence is presented in this source? How does this evidence help us better understand how and why the Holocaust happened? [This is a small list, but shows the systematic and bureaucratic persecution of Jews.]



Caption: Page from the Strop Report

'This is what the former Jewish residential quarter looks like after its destruction.' Warsaw, Poland, April–May 1943. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland, United States of America.⁷²

Der Rest ist im allgemeinen jüdischen Eigentum und dem Verwaltungsbüro.

Source: Photograph, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/
United States National Archives at College Park.*

<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/118663302>

⁷¹ For more information about the SS, please see <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/ss>.

⁷² <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/photo/page-from-the-strop-report>

Context:

The Warsaw Ghetto was the largest in occupied Europe, containing more than 400,000 Jews when it was created in 1940. By April 1943 and the start of the uprising, there were only just over 60,000 Jews left after mass deportations for murder in the Treblinka killing centre.

SS Major General Juergen Stroop was the commander of the German forces that suppressed the Warsaw ghetto uprising. He compiled an album of photographs and other material that was later used in evidence at the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, the trial of the Nazi orchestrators of the Holocaust.

Answer the following questions about this piece of evidence:

- What information does this source provide? [An image of destruction based on the clues: smoke, possibly a fire in one of the buildings on the left, and a dirty street. There is also a carriage, a group of people walking, possibly Jews or SS officers.]
- Who created or wrote the source? [The photo was probably taken by the SS and the report in which it is included was written by SS Major General Juergen Stroop, a high-ranking Nazi official.]
- When was the source created? [Around May 1943. We know this because Stroop identified this as the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto, which took place in April–May 1943.]
- Where is the source from (geographically and, if relevant, from what site)? [Warsaw in Nazi-occupied Poland; held in the National Archives and Records Administration in the United States of America.]
- Why was the source created? [To document the SS's liquidation and destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto after the uprising.]
- What information do you think is missing? In what sources might you find this missing information? [It does not specify what happened to the Jewish residents or why this liquidation took place. It is necessary to look at deportation dates, locations, and lists to learn what happened to the inhabitants of the ghetto. It is also important to learn about how and why this liquidation took place, which can be found in the rest of Major General Stroop's album, survivor testimony, and other Nazi documents from this event.]
- What evidence is presented in this source? How does this evidence help us better understand how and why the Holocaust happened? [Photographic evidence after the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto in May 1943. Visual evidence of the destruction of the ghetto as well as a caption that confirms the destruction of where Jews were previously forced to live.]



Caption: Rivka Kuper testifying at the trial of Adolf Eichmann in the District Court of Jerusalem in 1961.⁷³

Context:

The trial of Adolf Eichmann, the man who oversaw the implementation of 'The Final Solution,' took place in Jerusalem, Israel, in 1960–1961. Survivors shared accounts of their experiences that highlighted Eichmann's crimes as one of the organizers of the Holocaust.

Source: Survivor testimony of Rivka Kuper, National Photo Collection of Israel. Material available in the [Public Domain](#)

Answer the following questions about this piece of evidence:

- What information does this source provide? [Holocaust survivor giving testimony. We can see she is sitting on a stand in front of a microphone and holding a photo of people. In the foreground, the prosecutor is speaking to her.]
- Who created or wrote the source? [The photo was probably taken by the press.]
- When was the source created? [1961, because we know this photo is from the Eichmann Trial, which took place in 1960–1961.]
- Where is the source from (geographically and, if relevant, from what site)? [Jerusalem court room; held in the National Photo Collection, Israel.]
- Why was the source created? [To document Holocaust survivor Rivka Shiloh sharing her testimony as evidence during the trial of Adolf Eichmann.]
- What information do you think is missing? In what sources might you find this missing information? [The photo doesn't document what she said specifically or show who is in the photo she is holding. Reading a transcript of her testimony would provide that additional information.]
- What evidence is presented in this source? How does this evidence help us better understand how and why the Holocaust happened? [The photo shows documentation of the trial and that survivors testified at the trial, but does not convey what was said.]

73 <https://gpophotoeng.gov.il/fotoweb/Grid.fwx?search=D411-004.jpg#Preview1>; See also Jewish Women's Archive. 'Rivka Kuper Liebeskind'. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/liebeskind-rivka-kuper>

Yahad-In-Unum⁷⁴ witness interview about execution sites of Jews in Dunayivtsi, Ukraine.⁷⁵

Context:

SS units called Einsatzgruppen, or mobile killing squads, operated behind the German military and were tasked with removing anyone who was a 'threat' to the Nazis. Ultimately, the mass shootings in Eastern Europe, and primarily in the former Soviet Union, killed approximately 2 million Jews, about a third of the total number of Jews killed during the Holocaust.⁷⁶

Yahad-In Unum is an organization founded to locate the sites of mass graves of Jewish victims of the Nazi mobile killing units. The team travels from village to village, where they interview and film surviving eyewitnesses. Interviews from the village of Dunayivtsi in Ukraine are available to watch at <https://yahadmap.org/#village/dunavitsi-khmelnyskyi-ukraine.65>

Watch the clip and then answer the following questions about this piece of evidence:

- What information does this source provide? [Ukrainian witness to the killing of Jews from her town. We know this is an interview because we hear the interviewer ask questions.]
- Who created or wrote the source? [Yahad-In-Unum, a French organization that searches for and identifies mass Jewish killing sites in Eastern Europe, collects the forensic evidence of these mass shootings, and interviews witnesses (we know this from their website).]
- When was the source created? [2020, according to a title slide in the clip.]
- Where is the source from (geographically and, if relevant, from what site)? [Dunayivtsi, Ukraine. There were five execution sites in this location (we know this from the Yahad-In-Unum website). This was an area that experienced mass shootings of Jews under Nazi occupation.]
- Why was the source created? [To document witnesses to the killing of Jews in their town. This provides evidence of the intentional murder of Jews during the Holocaust.]
- What information do you think is missing? In what sources might you find this missing information? [It would be helpful to get more historical context about Jews living in this town or region before the Holocaust, and more about what happened to the region during the Holocaust. Documentation about killings

74 For more information about Yahad-In-Unum, please see <https://www.yiu.ngo/en>

75 <https://yahadmap.org/#village/dunavitsi-khmelnyskyi-ukraine.65>

76 For more information about the *Einsatzgruppen*, please see <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/einsatzgruppen>

by the Einsatzgruppen in this region could provide statistics. This is a short clip from a longer interview so listening to the full testimony might provide additional information.

- What evidence is presented in this source? How does this evidence help us better understand how and why the Holocaust happened? [The clip documents testimony from local residents of mass killings in this particular area. Given the scope of the mass shooting operations in Eastern Europe during the Holocaust, witnesses testimony is a crucial piece of evidence about individuals and communities that were destroyed, where there may not be notable physical evidence.]

How does gender interact with Holocaust denial and distortion?

- Holocaust denial and distortion often reflect sexism and gender inequality. Women, who were important witnesses to the Holocaust as both victims and resisters, are often left out of historical accounts, and their stories are sometimes ignored or questioned. Deniers may exploit gendered stereotypes to discredit female survivors by casting doubt on their credibility, portraying them as overly emotional or unreliable. Important experiences of women, such as facing sexual violence or helping their families survive in terrible conditions, are often erased. This erasure hides the full truth of what happened during the Holocaust.

Discussion questions

- Read about the stories of women who witnessed, resisted and documented the Holocaust at <https://wienerholocaustlibrary.org/2023/03/01/international-womens-day-witnessing-resisting-documenting>

Share the following discussion questions with your students:

- Why do you think people might ignore or dismiss stories from women about the Holocaust? How is that unfair?
- In what ways does the erasure or distortion of women’s experiences during the Holocaust—such as sexual violence or their roles in resistance—affect our understanding of Holocaust history?
- How do you think stereotypes about women, such as ideas like “women are too emotional”, influence the way people listen to their stories about history? Do you think that’s right?
- Reflecting on their courage, how can the stories of female Holocaust survivors, documenters and resisters, encourage us all to challenge Holocaust denial and distortion that we encounter in our own lives?

Lesson 8.

'I was there. I saw it.

It happened to me': The value
of survivor testimony

Rationale:

The rise of Holocaust denial and distortion is dangerous to the truth of the Holocaust, but also to the victims and their memory. Survivor testimony is a powerful way to re-humanize the victims, make history more tangible, and allow viewers to become bearers of their memory. This lesson deals with survivor testimony specifically.

Learning objectives:

- To understand the value and contribution of testimony as evidence and to recognize its challenges.
- To understand the impact of Holocaust distortion and denial on survivors and on Holocaust memory.

Subjects: history

Skills: media literacy, historical literacy, critical thinking, empathy building

Target learners: high school, ages 14–18

Time needed: 45–55 minutes

Required: printed materials or computer and internet access

Notes to educators:


- Most activity questions include responses in brackets, except opinion questions. The responses are not comprehensive but offer a range of possible answers. Educators are encouraged to allow students to answer the questions first and only then to use the provided responses to supplement student responses.
- The microphone icon indicates what should be said aloud. The arrow indicates guidance for the educator.

Introduction (10–15 minutes)



Even during the Holocaust, the Nazis denied or distorted the facts of the Holocaust. They intentionally tried to erase traces of their crimes by destroying evidence, such as blowing up gas chambers and crematoria or burning important documents. Since the Holocaust, this has continued and expanded to distorting the history and the memory of the Holocaust.


In postwar trials of Nazi perpetrators, Holocaust survivor testimony became a key source of evidence, especially during the trial of Adolf Eichmann⁷⁷ in 1960–1961.

 **Today, many survivors are using their voices to raise awareness about the Holocaust. As an example, let's watch the brief video of Holocaust survivor Eva Schloss on 'It Started With Words'.⁷⁸ This video is part of a survivor-led digital campaign created by the Claims Conference, which focuses on hatred before the Holocaust.⁷⁹**

▶ **Discussion questions:**

- What is the message of this video? [The Holocaust didn't start with violence, it started with words. For some Holocaust survivors, their lives changed overnight and close friends could completely distance themselves from Jews.]
- Why do you think survivors created the digital project 'It Started With Words'? [They wanted to reach the younger generation on a platform young people use.]
- What feelings or emotions does it evoke in you?
- What is the impact of hearing survivor testimony?

Activity (15–25 minutes)

 **Survivor testimony is a powerful way to re-humanize the victims, make the history more tangible, offer moral messages, and become bearers of their memory.⁸⁰ Survivors have been writing, speaking and recording their testimony for several decades. Some survivors have directly addressed the personal impact of Holocaust denial and distortion.**

 **The rise of Holocaust denial and distortion is dangerous to the truth of the Holocaust, but also to the victims and their memory, and their**

77 If students are not familiar with the Eichmann Trial, it would be beneficial to review this context. You can find helpful resources here: <https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/eichmann-trial.html>

78 https://vimeo.com/519703302?autoplay=1&muted=1&stream_id=Y2xpcHN8Mzk3Mzl1OXxpZDpkZXNjffTd

79 For additional short videos in this campaign, please see <https://www.claimscon.org/2021/04/it-started-with-words/>

80 <https://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/lesson-plans/use-of-testimony.html>; <https://museeholocauste.ca/en/resources-training/survivor-testimony/>

descendants. In this activity, you will watch or read examples of survivor testimony of Brigitte Altman and Edith Baneth about the impact of distortion and denial.⁸¹

- ▶ **For each of the clips, consider the following questions:**
 - What is the survivor's message?
 - How does the format impact your understanding of the message?
 - What is the goal of this type of testimony?
 - Why do you think it is important to hear or read this testimony?

Notes for educators about the clips:

- **Brigitte Altman:** Brigitte expresses her reaction to Holocaust denial and talks about the importance of documenting the Holocaust. Originally from Klaipeda, Lithuania, Brigitte was smuggled out of the Kovno Ghetto with the help of her father's former business associate, and she survived the Holocaust working on his farm.
- **Edith Baneth:** Edith explains why she came forward to give her testimony after decades of silence. Originally from Opava, Czechoslovakia, she was a survivor of Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, Neuengamme and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps.

Reflection (10–15 minutes)



After analysing survivor testimony, let's reflect on testimony as a source of evidence.

- What are some of the limitations of testimony? [Memory is fallible; the events happened so many years ago that survivors may not remember all the details.]
- If a survivor makes historical errors in his or her testimony, how can we analyse it and respond? [Students can corroborate the information by researching primary sources and scholarship about the time period, location, camp, etc.]

⁸¹ Videos available from: https://iwwitness.usc.edu/sites/denial?at=cg&clip=191&entry=0_iitnn4yq

- Despite these challenges, why is survivor testimony valuable? [Testimony is still valuable because it humanizes the history, makes it tangible, shows the diversity of experiences, keeps the memory of victims alive, and offers us more evidence of the realities of the Holocaust. Testimony will continue to be an important source for historical research, to ensure the nuances and complexities of the Holocaust are represented and corroborated by other sources.]

- ▶ **Additional context for educators: It is important to understand that Holocaust deniers primarily target survivor testimonies because survivors have endured deep trauma, making them psychologically vulnerable, and their memories may have altered over time. Deniers exploit this vulnerability to discredit the survivors' accounts and attempt to rewrite history.**

WORKSHEET:

'I was there. I saw it. It happened to me': The value of survivor testimony

Brigitte Altman

Holocaust survivor Brigitte Altman⁸²

Interview: 17 August 1997

'To document by word and – and pictures that not only did the Holocaust, unfortunately, happen, but that the so-called or pseudo-Holocaust revisionists are just so blatantly wrong. And how do they have the audacity to claim that the – the Holocaust never existed, that it's a figment of the Jewish imagination, and if indeed parts of the story are true, they're greatly exaggerated. All I can say to them is, I wish they were right. I wish it had never happened. But in the face of all the documentation, and testimony, how can they still continue, and poison so many minds with their vicious propaganda?'

Source: USC Shoah Foundation. © USC Shoah Foundation*

Consider the following questions:

- What is the survivor's message? [There is so much documentation that it is difficult to understand how people can deny the Holocaust happened.]
- How does the format impact your understanding of the message?
- What is the goal of this type of testimony? [To understand the harm that denial or distortion can cause to those who lived through the Holocaust.]
- Why do you think it is important to hear or read this testimony?

82 https://iwitNESS.usc.edu/sites/denial?at=cg&clip=191&entry=0_iitnn4yq

Edith Baneth

Holocaust survivor Edith Baneth⁸³

Interview: 27 January 1998

'I have been quiet for 50 years. I shut the door on it because that was the only way how I could have started a new life. And the recent years, because of the films which came on television – I never can quite understand why it took the world 30 or 40 years, actually, to bring those things all out. We were forgotten for 30 years. Nobody talked about it. Nobody knew about it. Even Jewish people living here were not quite informed about. But then came, suddenly, Nazis, people with newspapers out. The Holocaust is – is a fiction. There – that could not possibly be that six millions have died. That is all just – the Jews made it up.

And that suddenly opened the doors for me again. An anger came in me, I, who have seen them daily going, seeing the chimney burning after two hours them being gassed, seen them arrived by the train, seen so many dead, how somebody possibly could say that it isn't true. That what I think I had to open my memory. I – every time when I talk about it, I have to go through living it through. And believe me, it isn't easy. It takes me now quite a few days before I can sleep and come back to – to the day where I am living today. But I do it out of anger that there – that there could be somebody in the world who can say it hasn't happened. And I hope that these tapes will be kept for another three, four generations and will avoid that it should [ever] happen again and that lessons can be learned.'

Source: USC Shoah Foundation. © USC Shoah Foundation*

Consider the following questions:

- What is the survivor's message? [She felt she needed to share her story when people started denying what she experienced.]
- How does the format impact your understanding of the message?
- What is the goal of this type of testimony? [To understand the harm that denial or distortion can cause to those who lived through the Holocaust.]
- Why do you think it is important to hear or read this testimony?
- How does the format impact your understanding of the message?
- What is the goal of this type of testimony? [To understand the harm that denial or distortion can cause to those who lived through the Holocaust.]
- Why do you think it is important to hear or read this testimony?

83 https://iwatch.usc.edu/sites/denial?at=cg&clip=301&entry=0_ne6h48xx

Lesson 9.

Context is key:

Benefits and challenges
of photos as visual evidence

Rationale:

For many of us, a photo may indicate that what the image shows is true or factual evidence. However, in an age of AI and disinformation, photos can be easily manipulated, and it is necessary to develop skills to recognize, evaluate and combat manipulated images.

Learning objectives:

- To build skills in evaluating photographs and images.
- To understand that visuals do not always indicate fact, especially with the use of technology today.

Subjects: social studies, history

Skills: media and information literacy, historical literacy, critical thinking

Target learners: high school, ages 14–18

Time needed: 40–50 minutes

Required: printed materials; computer and internet access recommended


Notes to educators:

- Most activity questions include responses in brackets, except opinion questions. The responses are not comprehensive but offer a range of possible answers. Educators are encouraged to allow students to answer the questions first and only then to use the provided responses to supplement student responses.
- The microphone icon indicates what should be said aloud. The arrow indicates guidance for the educator.
- It is helpful to review and be prepared to discuss the images you use in this lesson.⁸⁴

Introduction (10–20 minutes)

- ▶ **Educators should demonstrate how to analyse a photo, walking through the questions below. Some of the information is known from the holding institution’s archival pages about the photos. For those with computer and internet access, it may be helpful to also show how to read through a record page to learn additional information.**

⁸⁴ For more guidance on identifying deep fakes, please see <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/ai-and-holocaust-rewriting-history-impact-artificial-intelligence-understanding-holocaust>

 When analysing a photo, there are several layers to explore. The first step is to look and analyse the image itself. Then, there is the caption and additional information that might be provided. This can be followed by archival or secondary sources that corroborate an image. In this lesson, we will analyse photos using this approach.

 **Step 1: We will look at the photo by without the caption or any context.**



Photo credit: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Guenther Schwarberg.*

- What information does this source provide? [A group of children in ragged clothing standing in the street. Their facial expressions may indicate concern, worry and scepticism. We know it is Poland, because the store sign behind them is in Polish. (Students may not recognize this language.) (in Warsaw, Poland).]

 **Step 2: Now we'll read the caption and any necessary context to analyse the photo further.**

Children on the street in the Warsaw ghetto. Jöst's original caption reads: 'The hunger and misery of most of the children one saw showed more in their clothing than in their faces.' Photo taken and caption written by Wehrmacht Sergeant Heinrich Jöst, Warsaw Ghetto, 19 September 1941. USHMM.⁸⁵

85 <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa2426>

► **The approach here is to analyse the photo using three categories of questions.**

■ **Evaluation questions:**

- How does the caption help us understand the source information? [The caption gives us the photographer, the date, and the location: Wehrmacht Sergeant Heinrich Jöst, Warsaw Ghetto, 19 September 1941.]
- Who created or wrote the source? What does this information tell us about the source? [The photograph was taken by a German soldier; he chose how to frame the shot, what to focus on, and possibly assembled the children in particular poses. The photographer constructed the image to show his interests and intent, his perspective on the world as reflected in the photo. The photo belongs to the Jewish Historical Institute, a cultural and research institution of Polish-Jewish history located in Poland.]
- When was the source created? [19 September 1941]
- Is the source authentic? [It is held in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collections, a reliable archive.]
- Why was it created/what is its purpose? What was the maker's intention? Why is this significant? [The German soldier documented what he saw when he went into the Warsaw Ghetto. We do not know what he planned to do with the photos. He may have taken this one for personal or professional reasons, but even if we do not know his motivation, him being a German soldier would have affected how the subjects of the photo interacted with him. The caption he put on this photo indicates that he knew children were hungry and suffering in the Warsaw Ghetto.⁸⁶]
- Who is the intended audience? [We do not know from this image or caption.]

■ **Questions about reliability:**

- What hints are there about the reliability of the image? [The photo is in black and white, and there is confirmation and a caption from the photographer himself. The photo is also found in a reputable archive.]
- Why does reliability matter? [Inaccurate information would lead someone to discredit the source. However, in this case, there is nothing to indicate this image is not reliable.]
- How can we authenticate the image to confirm accuracy? [You can trust reputable archives and sites. You can also find the original version of the image and the related captions and information. In this case, the photographer himself attested to the authenticity of this image.]

⁸⁶ Some of this information is found more clearly in the photo's record page. If students have access to computers and internet, it might be helpful to have them review the record page to respond more in-depth to questions.

- Questions about relevant context:
 - How does the historical context help us better understand the image? How does it compare with the example? [There are several context clues that help us understand the image better. We know the photo was taken on 19 September 1941. By this time, the Warsaw Ghetto had been closed off from the non-Jewish part of the city since November 1940. This is helpful to know, because it speaks to why the children are hungry, wearing ragged clothing, and look suspicious of the photographer – a closed ghetto meant that the inhabitants had limited access to food, medicine, information, etc. Additionally, Jöst was in the German military, so children seeing a soldier inside the closed ghetto had reason to be concerned and curious.]
 - What are the challenges or limitations of this image? [The view is through the gaze of the photographer, who is not a neutral source. It does not show the full reality of the time, but rather a particular moment or situation from the perspective of the photographer. We do not know how the subjects of the photo felt about the photo, whether they had agency, how they might have wanted to be portrayed, etc. Viewers should be aware of these limitations when analysing the photo.]
 - What additional context would be helpful? Where can we find this additional information? [It would be helpful to learn about the conditions in and the scale and scope of the Warsaw Ghetto, and the lived experience of the Jews there. This information can be found in other sources, such as survivor testimonies, memoirs and diaries, and in Nazi documents about the number of Jews in the ghetto at different times during this period and the conditions of the Warsaw Ghetto.]
- ▶ **If students have access to computers and the internet, they can look up the photo on the website and further analyse it and its context based on the information provided there.**

Activity (10–20 minutes)

- ▶ **Students will analyse additional photos using the same approach. Below is another historical photo, this one addressing denial and distortion during the Holocaust. Educators can identify contemporary images of manifestations of Holocaust denial and distortion and have students apply this approach to additional examples.**



Step 1: Let's look at the photo without the caption or any context.



Photo credit: © International Committee of the Red Cross/ Maurice Rossel / 1944/ Guerre 1939-1945. Theresienstadt, ghetto/ Reference : V-P-HIST-01160-32*

- What information does this source provide? [A photo of Jewish children, most of whom are looking at the camera. We know they are Jewish, because we can see they are wearing the yellow Star of David.⁸⁷]



Step 2: Now let's read the caption and any necessary context to analyse the photo further.

'Jewish children in the Theresienstadt ghetto. A photograph of Jewish children in the Theresienstadt Ghetto taken during an inspection by the International Red Cross. Prior to this visit, the ghetto was 'beautified' in order to deceive the visitors. Czechoslovakia, June 23, 1944. Comité International de la Croix-Rouge [International Red Cross].'

Caption retrieved from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website.⁸⁸

Evaluation questions:

- Who created or wrote the source? [International Red Cross during an inspection of the Theresienstadt Ghetto.]

⁸⁷ For information on the Star of David and other badges used during the Holocaust, please see <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-badge-during-the-nazi-era>.

⁸⁸ <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/theresienstadt-red-cross-visit>

- When was the source created? [23 June 1944]
- Is the source authentic? [The photo was taken by the International Red Cross, which conducted the visit to the ghetto. It was retrieved from a reliable Holocaust museum and memorial site.]
- Why was it created/what is its purpose? What was the maker's intent? [To document a visit to the Nazi ghetto. The fact that an international organization was visiting the ghetto and the use of the term 'inspection' in the caption leads the viewer to question why the Red Cross may have been in Theresienstadt. The organization was probably checking and documenting the conditions of the ghetto and its inmates.^{89]}
- Who is the intended audience? [The International Red Cross and the international community. The Danish government requested that the organization check on the fate of Danish Jews who were deported to Theresienstadt.^{90]}

Questions about reliability:

- What hints are there about the reliability of the image? [The photo is in black and white, but some of the children look like they are smiling, which may encourage the viewer to ask some questions about the context.]
- What questions does the image raise that may need to be verified or corroborated? Why does it matter? [Some of the children look like they are smiling and well dressed. As this was a photo taken in the Theresienstadt Ghetto, it is important to understand the context of the place and the conditions under which the photo may have been taken.]
- How can we authenticate the image to confirm accuracy? [You can trust reliable archives and sites, but you can also look for the original version of the image and the related captions and information. In this case, we know and trust the source of the image.]

Questions about the context:⁹¹

- How does the historical context help us better understand the image? [We know that the Nazis increased deportations before the visit, beautified the ghetto, provided more food for prisoners who would be seen by the visitors so they would appear healthy, and had prisoners perform activities that made it seem like they were living normal life. We know, based on this information, that the Nazis deceived the International Red Cross visitors into thinking that

89 For more information on the International Red Cross's visit to the Theresienstadt Ghetto, please see <https://www.holocaust.cz/en/history/events/embellishment-and-the-visit-of-the-international-committee-of-the-red-cross-to-terezin/> or <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/theresienstadt>

90 Ibid.

91 If it wasn't covered previously, provide students with information about Theresienstadt and the 1944 International Red Cross visit.

this was a safe place for Jews. This was an active form of distortion during the Holocaust.]

- What are the challenges or limitations of this image? [The view is through the gaze of the photographer, who is only able to see what is put in front of him/her. It does not show the true reality of these children's lives. We do not know how the subjects of the photo felt about the photo, if they had agency, how they might have wanted to be portrayed, etc. Viewers should be aware of these limitations when analysing the photo.]

Reflection (7–10 minutes)

► **To conclude, ask any of the following questions:**

- What is the impact of taking a photo out of context?
- Why is it important to examine the different layers of context?
- Why is this analysis important when looking at historical and contemporary photos?
- What is our responsibility when we look at or use photos?
- How do these manipulations impact our understanding of Holocaust history?



How can we apply the skills learned in this lesson in our lives?

What would you do differently now when you see photos in the media?

[Highlight that this process of critical evaluation should be used when interacting with content on various sites and platforms.]

Suggested additional activity

To supplement the photo of the children in the Warsaw Ghetto (first photo), students can learn more about Heinrich Jöst and his photographs by reading excerpts from the book *In the Ghetto of Warsaw: Photographs by Heinrich Jöst*, written by Günther Schwarberg, who interviewed Jöst about these photos in 1982.

Students can read an excerpt from a diary or writing from the Oneg Shabbat Archives to better understand the context of the historical photo.⁹² By reading descriptions from someone who lived in the Warsaw Ghetto at this time, students

⁹² <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-oneg-shabbat-archive>

will gain the important victim perspective that cannot be deduced solely by looking at a photo, especially one taken by a German soldier.

Misinformation and disinformation can help us better understand types of Holocaust denial and distortion. These terms both refer to information that is misleading or inaccurate, but the difference lies with the intent to deceive or harm. Misinformation refers to information that is shared *without* intent to harm or deceive; disinformation refers to information that is shared *with* intent to harm or deceive. There are several types of mis- and disinformation, including the following:⁹³

- Satire: using humour or exaggeration to criticize or mock.
- False context: content that is taken out of its original context and put in a false context to change its meaning.
- Imposter content: content that uses a known name or brand to trick people into believing it is authentic.
- Fabricated content: content that is completely made up and designed to deceive.
- Manipulated content: original content that has been changed to deceive or create a false context.

After explaining the terms, educators can ask students to determine which type of mis- or disinformation each example falls into and why.

Additional resources

UNESCO has additional resources for further activity options in Media and information literate citizens: think critically, click wisely! (Second edition of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy for Educators and Learners).

- Media and information literacy curriculum – specifically modules 5, 6 and 7 on audiences and representatives, <https://www.unesco.org/mil4teachers/en/curriculum>

93 <https://newslit.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/5-Types-of-Misinformation-Poster.pdf>

Lesson 10.
Countering conspiracy
theories about the Holocaust

Rationale:

Conspiracy theories about the Holocaust are particularly dangerous and often lead to belief in other conspiracy theories. In this session, students will discuss the concept of conspiracy theories, and learn more about their power through a former conspiracy theorist's own experience and changing beliefs.

Learning objectives:

- To understand what a conspiracy theory is.
- To consider ways to respond to conspiracy theories.

Subjects: social studies, history, current events

Skills: critical thinking, building respect for others

Target learners: high school, ages 14–18

Time needed: 15-25 minutes

Required: printed materials or computer and internet access

Notes to educators:

- Most activity questions include responses in brackets, except opinion questions. The responses are not comprehensive but offer a range of possible answers. Educators are encouraged to allow students to answer the questions first and only then to use the provided responses to supplement student responses.
- The microphone icon indicates what should be said aloud. The arrow indicates guidance for the educator.

Activity (15-25 minutes)



In this lesson, we will examine conspiracy theories about the Holocaust and explore why they can be dangerous. Let's begin by defining the term conspiracy theory. [Some conspiracies do exist, but the term 'conspiracy theory' refers to the belief that events are being secretly manipulated by powerful forces with negative intent. Typically, conspiracy theories involve an imagined group of conspirators colluding to implement an alleged secret plot.]



‘Most conspiracy theories seem implausible and some even amusing, [but] they can seriously impact societies, eroding trust and social cohesion. They also underpin many hateful ideologies and violent extremist ideas.’⁹⁴ Antisemitic conspiracy theories⁹⁵ have been around for centuries and continue to pose dangers to Jews today. Conspiracy theories about the Holocaust are related to Holocaust denial and distortion rhetoric. For example, Holocaust deniers claim that there is a conspiracy involving the victorious Second World War Allies, Jews, and the state of Israel to promote the ‘Holocaust myth’ to benefit themselves. Let’s delve into why conspiracy theories are dangerous.

► **Discuss the following questions.**

- Why might someone believe in conspiracy theories? [To explain unlikely events; because they are empowering for people who feel vulnerable or isolated; some conspiracy theories may be compelling because they break down complex ideas into simple ones; and once someone believes in one it is easier to believe in other conspiracy theories. Complexity is often perceived as threatening, making people susceptible to agendas and ideologies – they may look for something to ground their psychological needs.]
- What makes Holocaust denial a conspiracy theory? [Holocaust deniers claim that the Holocaust is made up or exaggerated despite there being significant evidence from a wide range of sources that the Holocaust happened. By raising doubts about the truth of this history, they are accusing Jews of ‘conspiring’ to benefit from the Holocaust.]
- When and how do conspiracy theories become dangerous? [When they form the basis for extremist ideologies or lead us to act violently on a belief against a group of people or lose trust in public institutions.]
- What are some of the challenges to countering conspiracy theories? [Conspiracy theories are rooted in beliefs, not in facts. Logic or evidence may not be as helpful to counteract the dangers of conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theorists often easily shift from one conspiracy theory to another, which can amplify the dangers.]
- In what ways can we address conspiracy theories? [Try to understand our own beliefs and biases; build resilience through media and information literacy skills; teach about conspiracy theories before young people may be exposed to them; offer alternative explanations for the theories; and approach any conversation with empathy.]

⁹⁴ <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/addressing-conspiracy-theories-through-education-unesco-guidance-teachers>

⁹⁵ For more on addressing antisemitism, please see the guidelines of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which can be found here: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/120546>

Lesson 11.
When are Holocaust
comparisons appropriate?

Rationale:

Due to the severity of the Holocaust, people often use it as a point of comparison or connection to contemporary events. In the past few years, these comparisons have become more public and thus more problematic, which requires us to ask important questions about when and in what context it is appropriate to make comparisons and connections to the Holocaust.

Learning objectives:

- To ascertain when a comparison to the Holocaust is appropriate.
- To understand the dangers of inappropriate comparisons to the Holocaust.

Subjects: social studies, history, current events

Skills: critical thinking

Target learners: high school, ages 14–18

Time needed: 30–45 minutes

Required: printed materials

Notes to educators:

- Most activity questions include responses in brackets, except opinion questions. The responses are not comprehensive but offer a range of possible answers. Educators are encouraged to allow students to answer the questions first and only then to use the provided responses to supplement student responses.
- The microphone icon indicates what should be said aloud. The arrow indicates guidance for the educator.
- In 2023 the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance published Reflections on Terminology for Holocaust Comparison as a tool that offers questions for reflection on the topic of comparison. These questions may be particularly helpful when preparing the lesson:⁹⁶
 - ‘Does the choice of terms respect the historic particularity of each of the events that are being discussed?’
 - Does the choice of terms respect the historic particularity and unprecedented character of the Holocaust?

96 <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/terminology-holocaust-comparison>

- Does the word choice reflect the meaning that while there are common patterns between genocides, each case of genocide or mass atrocity crime differs from the Holocaust and from each other?
- Could [umbrella] terms such as ‘other genocides’ or ‘other victim groups’ be interpreted as disrespectful regarding the specificity of a particular atrocity? Do these terms create a hierarchy of victim groups, where some are named and others just subsumed into an abstract term?
- Which terms would survivor communities prefer to use/would rather use?
- When the term ‘compare’ is used, can you specify your intention? For example, is your intention to find similarities and differences between the Holocaust and other events? Or do you aim to identify common patterns in order to combat genocide today? Or do you intend to compare certain topics or processes (such as the role of ideology, mass violence, war, or gender issues)? Or is there anything else that motivates your intention?
- Does your choice of words unintentionally hide certain aspects of history and exploit the Holocaust or different mass atrocity crimes for contemporary political purposes, or trivialize them?’

Introduction (5–10 minutes)



The Holocaust is often used as a point of comparison or reference to contemporary events. Let’s break down what this means.

- What is a comparison? You can ask for examples. [A comparison is an assessment of similarities and differences between at least two things. Is the intention to find similarities and differences between the Holocaust and other events? Or to identify common patterns in order to prevent genocide today? Or to compare certain topics or processes?]
- What is the difference between comparing and equating? [Equating is asserting that two things are the same, whereas comparing looks at similarities and differences between two things.]
- What are the benefits of a comparison? What are the challenges? [Benefits: it can help make connections between items, events, etc. and help understand patterns. Challenges: these connections and patterns are not always appropriate if they mask certain aspects of history and exploit the Holocaust or other mass atrocity crimes for contemporary political purposes, or trivialize them.]
- What can we learn from comparing two or more historical events? [We can learn about links between events, or parallels we see in different contexts.]

- What are some of the challenges when it comes to comparing historical events? [It is important to remember that each historical event is unique, and we need to be mindful that we do not conflate or combine them so as to lose the nuance of each event. It is difficult to know how much knowledge or expertise about the historical events one needs to draw comparisons accurately and sensitively. It is also important to carefully identify and justify the criteria used in making a comparison.]

Activity (15–25 minutes; Part I: 10–15 minutes, Part II: 5–10 minutes)

Part I

- ▶ **Begin with the historical context of how the Nazis used the yellow star to identify, humiliate and segregate Jews, and to facilitate deportation to camps.**



One of the symbols of the Holocaust was the yellow star.⁹⁷ Let's review how this symbol was used and for what purpose.

- What was the purpose of the yellow star during the Holocaust? [They were used to identify, humiliate and isolate Jews, so that the Nazis could ultimately murder them.⁹⁸]



Considering the Nazis' use of the yellow star, we will examine the use of a yellow star in a contemporary context.⁹⁹

- ▶ **Discuss the following questions.**
 - What is happening in this photo? How do you know?
 - When do you think this photo is from?
 - What is the yellow star meant to represent in this context? What is the message?
 - Why do you think it was used?
 - Is this an appropriate comparison to the Holocaust? Why or why not?

97 For additional information about the yellow star, please see Jewish Badge: During the Nazi Era. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-badge-during-the-nazi-era>

98 It is important to note that Jews had different types of experiences during the Holocaust. What happened in one ghetto or country may be different from what happened somewhere else. Local context is important to keep in mind.

99 Although it is not covered in the lesson itself, it is important to note the conspiracy theories that were also spread around COVID-19, such as that Jewish people were behind COVID and that they were trying to profit from the pandemic, or that they were immune to COVID as they allegedly manufactured it.

Image 1



Photo credit: Dietmar Rauscher/Shutterstock*

Answer the following questions:

- What is happening in this photo? How do you know? [Someone is using the yellow star symbol to protest against COVID-19 vaccination. The font uses some Hebrew letters and other letters that appear similar to Hebrew letters.]
- When do you think this photo is from? [The COVID-19 pandemic]
- What is the yellow star meant to represent in this context? What is the message? [The identification and isolation of someone who is not vaccinated against COVID-19. The message is that the person feels isolated or ostracized for not being vaccinated and may be seeking to present themselves as a victim. It could also be intended to sensationalize and shock, perhaps with malicious intent. The Hebrew font may be antisemitic in that the person is aiming to differentiate themselves like the Jews were identified and discriminated against during the Holocaust.]
- Why do you think it was used?
- Is this an appropriate comparison to the Holocaust? Why or why not?

Image 2



Photo credit: Alexandros Michailidis/Shutterstock*

Answer the following questions:

- What is happening in this photo? How do you know? [Someone is using the yellow star symbol to suggest he feels the same as a Jew during the Holocaust. The use of the term 'vaccinazi' to suggest that those promote the COVID-19 vaccination programmes and health restrictions were equal to the Nazi's treatment of the Jews.]
- When do you think this photo is from? [The COVID-19 pandemic]
- What is the yellow star meant to represent in this context? What is the message? [The identification and isolation of someone who is not vaccinated against COVID-19. The message is that the person equates their position to that of a Jew during the Holocaust, isolated or ostracized for not being vaccinated. It could also be intended to sensationalize and shock, perhaps with malicious intent.]
- Why do you think it was used?
- Is this an appropriate comparison to the Holocaust? Why or why not?



Now that we have analysed these examples of the yellow star being used recently, let's consider the impact of these comparisons.

- Given this historical context, what is the impact of COVID-19 protesters using this symbol and making such a comparison? What were they hoping to achieve? [They wanted to use a symbol that the general public would easily

understand to express the humiliation and discrimination they felt they were facing. They may also want to portray themselves as a 'victim' of a totalitarian state power.]

- What harm might these comparisons cause? [This inappropriate comparison distorts and minimizes the role of the yellow star in the persecution of Jews during the Holocaust.]
- How might seeing this comparison affect people who have a personal connection to the Holocaust? [This would be offensive to the memory of victims and survivors whose lives were actually at risk during the Holocaust.]

PART II



It is important to understand the impact that using the yellow star in this type of contemporary context has on Holocaust survivors. Listen to or read the testimony of Margot Friedlaender, a Holocaust survivor, about the effect of seeing the yellow star being used in protests against COVID-19 mandates.



Video is accessible from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPjoAPagEnc>
(recommended video excerpt: 00:00-1:12)

Photo credit: Alexandros Michailidis/Shutterstock.com*¹⁰⁰

100 Video is accessible from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPjoAPagEnc>

Text (from the video):

'It is with disbelief that now, as a 100 year old, I've had to see how symbols of our exclusion by the Nazis, the so called "Jewish Star," the Star of David, are shamelessly being used today by the new enemies of democracy on the streets; to style themselves, in the midst of a democracy, as victims. On a day like today we must stand together so that the memory of the Holocaust remains truthful and is not abused by anyone.'

► **Reflect on the clip.**

- What was Margot's message? [The use of the yellow star is hurtful to a Holocaust survivor.]
- What feelings did this video evoke for you?

Reflection (5–10 minutes)



In this activity, the contemporary comparisons were dangerous, because they distorted how these symbols were used during the Holocaust. To conclude, let's reflect on when Holocaust comparisons might be appropriate.

- When might it be appropriate to compare things to the Holocaust? [When you are trying to better understand how aspects of the history connect or inform other cases of genocide, and to identify differences or specificities.]
- When else might it be inappropriate? [When comparisons diminish or delegitimize the truth and suffering of people during the Holocaust, when they try to establish a hierarchy of suffering, or when they treat as equal events that are not comparable.]
- How can we respond to inappropriate comparisons to the Holocaust? [Point out why it is inappropriate and/or offer a more nuanced understanding.]

Additional resource

For further discussions about Holocaust comparisons, please see the video *Is it possible to compare the Holocaust to other genocides?*¹⁰¹ and the USHMM article, *Why Holocaust analogies are dangerous.*¹⁰²

101 <https://www.hmd.org.uk/news/is-it-possible-to-compare-the-holocaust-to-other-genocides/>

102 <https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-releases/why-holocaust-analogies-are-dangerous>

Lesson 12.
National narratives
and memorialization

Rationale:

It is challenging for any nation to grapple with its own difficult history. When it comes to the Holocaust, this can be particularly sensitive. This session encourages students to consider how a nation's historical narrative represents its past, and what it may mean when that narrative shifts.

Learning objectives:

- To understand complex aspects of national historical narratives.
- To recognize when narratives may shift and how to respond.

Subjects: social studies, history, current events

Skills: historical literacy, critical thinking

Target learners: high school, ages 14–18

Time needed: 40–60 minutes, can be broken into two lessons

Required: printed materials, or computer and internet access

Notes to educators:

- Most activity questions include responses in brackets, except opinion questions. The responses are not comprehensive but offer a range of possible answers. Educators are encouraged to allow students to answer the questions first and only then to use the provided responses to supplement student responses.
- The microphone icon indicates what should be said aloud. The arrow indicates guidance for the educator.

Introduction (5–10 minutes)



In this lesson, we will examine how a country can grapple with its difficult history. We will read an excerpt about the risks of glorifying the perpetrators of genocide.

'Genocide and Holocaust denial turns perpetrators and war criminals into heroes and heroines. It sows fear, mistrust, and hate. It divides people, communities, and states. It does not allow for healing and empathy. It also undermines the judicial decisions that have been made and therefore undermines justice. This is to the contrary of what societies which have experienced conflict and have a legacy of atrocity crimes require. It is unacceptable and must be condemned.'

- Alice Wairimu Nderitu, United Nations Under-Secretary-General, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, 2022.¹⁰³

► **As they read, ask the students to respond to the following questions:**

- What is Alice Wairimu Nderitu's main argument in this excerpt? [Glorification of genocide and/or perpetrators of atrocities is detrimental to rebuilding, healing, and preventing future atrocities.]
- What concerns does she note regarding the glorification of perpetrators? [Challenge for accountability of perpetrators, renewed hatred and violence, creates fear, mistrust, and hate within society, prevents healing, and undermines justice efforts.]

► **After reviewing the responses, ask students to consider the following questions:**

- Why do you think a country may glorify or praise people who committed atrocities?
 - Sometimes a leader can simultaneously help or protect one group but harm another group. How do you think this type of leader should be remembered in history?
 - Who gets to decide how this leader will be remembered?
 - Can the way a country remembers a leader change over time? If so, why might this happen?
- Why might people leave out difficult elements of their country's past? What impact might this have? [It can be difficult for individuals, governments and nations to confront a difficult past and can challenge a national identity. By not facing up to the past, it is easier to place the blame elsewhere – and this can be a national strategy for cover-up and or diversion by its national leaders for political purposes.]

103 https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/22-00041_OSAPG_PolicyPaper_Final.pdf

Activity (optional) (15–25 minutes)



Sometimes a country will start to reanalyse its own history. We will examine a contemporary example of a shift in a nation’s narrative.

- ▶ **Context: During the Holocaust, the Nazis built a concentration camp for Roma in Lety, Czechoslovakia. After the war, a pig farm was set up at the site. For many years, Roma activists and the international community called for the government to build a memorial at the site. Only in recent years has the Czech government, in response to local and international activism, acquired the pig farm and created a memorial in its place. The memorial opened in 2024.¹⁰⁴**

News article: A memorial opens on the site of a Nazi concentration camp for Roma after a pig farm was removed – AP News¹⁰⁵

- ▶ **Have students read the article and reflect on the key points.**
 - What is the article about? [A new memorial on the former site of a Nazi concentration camp for Roma.]
 - When did the event happen? [April 2024.]
 - What questions do you have about this? [Why was it created? Why was it created after so much time had passed?]
 - Why do you think the Czech Republic decided to create this memorial? [To remember and honour the Roma victims of the former Nazi camp at the site.]
 - Why do you think this memorial was created more than 80 years after the event? Why is this significant? What does it tell us about the memory of this history and how it has shifted? [It is never too late to memorialize and commemorate victims of atrocities.]

104 For more information about this site, please see remarks from the Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance at <https://holocaustremembrance.com/news/opening-lety-memorial> and a news article at <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/07/03/europe/roma-concentration-camp-czech-intl-cmd/index.html>

105 <https://apnews.com/article/czech-roma-wwii-memorial-pig-farm-lety-2981cb4c9c9fa5988689dba43c4e9935>

Activity (15–20 minutes)



Let's think about a local memorial, or an event that does not yet have a memorial. You will create a memorial plaque (or an announcement about a memorial) for a local example. As you design this, consider how to properly acknowledge the suffering, the victim groups, the perpetrators and narratives, as well as how perception of any of these may have changed over time.

▶ **Some notes for consideration:**

- This can include but is not limited to identifying who and what is to be memorialized; where the memorial is to be located; whose approval will be needed; why the site or event is being commemorated; and anticipating the reactions from various different social groups. (The local community, government, people with a connection to the event/site, etc.)
 - Students should consider whose voices have been influencing how the event is viewed and discussed, and whether the narrative around the event has shifted.
- ▶ **If this activity requires research, students can also explain how they evaluate the sources they use.¹⁰⁶**

Reflection (5–10 minutes)



To conclude, let's consider the why it is challenging for a country to decide how to remember an event.

- Why might societies contest their (violent) past through disputes about the narrative? Do these disputes tell us more about the present than about the past?
- How does a country's history impact how memorials are created?
- What might happen if the country wants to change the way it views an event?
- What can an individual do if they feel a national memorial is distorting the memory or truth about the Holocaust?

¹⁰⁶ Helpful guidelines for evaluating sources can be found in the activity about this topic.

Suggested additional activity

Students can study various Holocaust memorials and reflect on the following questions. It is suggested that local and/or national examples of memorials be included.

- Is there a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in your local area? Where are there Holocaust memorials? Where do you think there should be a memorial to the Holocaust?
- Who are the intended audience for the memorial?
- What, specifically, is the memorial representing or commemorating? Who is to be mentioned in or on the memorial? Who might be excluded?
- What story or message do you think the artist was trying to convey to the intended audience? What might the memorial be leaving out?



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United Nations
Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization

Countering Holocaust denial and distortion through education

Lesson activities for secondary education

This new guide for teachers, developed in partnership with the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, provides information and guidance on how to prevent Holocaust denial and distortion. In the digital age, the memory and fundamental facts of the Holocaust are under new threat from manipulation, falsification and the spread of violent ideologies. The guide provides pedagogical principles and practical strategies to support teachers in their approach to countering and preventing the spread of Holocaust disinformation and antisemitism.

