Strategies for Teaching the Holocaust

“The Boy Who Fought Hitler” opens the door to teaching about the Holocaust, a topic that might seem daunting to approach due to its complexity and horrific nature. To help you, we have consulted with experienced educators to provide some strategies to consider as you teach this

- Understand why it is important to teach about the Holocaust: It allows students to examine complexities in world history and understand how choices made by individuals, groups, and governments shaped the past and will shape the future.

- Students may have many questions about what happened and why. Answer as clearly as possible without oversimplifying. You will most likely feel more comfortable responding to their questions if you are confident in your own background knowledge. Countless print and online resources are available; two good starting points are Yad Vashem’s Holocaust Resource Center and The Simon Wiesenthal Center’s 36 Questions About the Holocaust.

- Emphasize the stories of human beings that make up the statistics and the groupings that students will learn about; groupings often include perpetrators, victims, rescuers, and bystanders. Accounts of individuals will not only help students understand some events and empathize with people who suffered, but it will also give them richer insights into the historical context.

- Guide discussions so students understand that not all Germans were Nazis, and although all Jews were targeted for destruction, they did not all have the same experiences.

- Present age-appropriate material and acknowledge the emotions of students who might become upset. Consider having students keep a journal where they can record their reactions and questions. You might also want to send a note to parents, informing them that students will be studying the Holocaust.

- If students come into discussions with misinformation, identify the misinformation and clarify facts. Emphasize the importance of using reliable sources.

- Study of the Holocaust can lead students to think critically about many issues, including prejudice, stereotyping, anti-Semitism, and indifference, as well as tolerance, responsibility, pluralism, and courage. Whichever themes you choose to emphasize in your lessons, encourage students to reflect on how learning about this topic can help them to shape a more responsible and caring world.

- For more in-depth strategies, consult the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s excellent guide, Guidelines for Teaching About the Holocaust.