



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



WHY

TEACH ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST?

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Cover photos:

Suitcases stolen from people deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau

©Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum/Paweł Sawicki

Exhibition of family portraits at Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

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Anny Horowitz, deported to Auschwitz from France at the age of 9 on 11 September 1942

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The unloading ramp and the main gate called the "Gate of Death"

© Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

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WHY

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“The history of the genocide perpetrated during the Second World War does not belong to the past only. It is a ‘living history’ that concerns us all, regardless of our background, culture, or religion. Other genocides have occurred after the Holocaust, on several continents. How can we draw better lessons from the past?”

Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
27 January 2012

WHY TEACH ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST?



© AFS / Cris Toala Olivares

UNESCO was created in the immediate aftermath of World War II by the Allied nations that had fought and defeated Nazi Germany. The racial ideology that motivated the German government during this period allowed for, and even encouraged, actions that had never occurred before in human history. Never before had civilians been targeted by military planners with such disregard for human life. Never before had a state pursued, as a matter of national policy, the complete and total destruction of groups identified as unworthy of living. Firmly centred in the history of Nazi Germany is the reality of the Holocaust or Shoah, the attempt by Nazi Germany and its collaborators to murder every Jewish man, woman and child within its grasp, a continent-wide programme of mass killing unprecedented in its totality.

WHAT IS THE HOLOCAUST?

The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. "Holocaust" is a word of Greek origin meaning "sacrifice by fire". The Nazis, who came to power in Germany in January 1933, believed that Germans were "racially superior" and that the Jews, deemed "inferior", were an alien threat to the so-called German racial community.

During the era of the Holocaust, German authorities also targeted other groups because of their perceived "racial inferiority": Roma (Gypsies), the disabled, and some of the Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others). Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C., USA

The Holocaust was the murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators. Between the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 and the end of the war in Europe in May 1945, Nazi Germany and its accomplices strove to murder every Jew under their domination. Because Nazi discrimination against the Jews began with Hitler's accession to power in January 1933, many historians consider this the start of the Holocaust era. The Jews were not the only victims of Hitler's regime, but they were the only group that the Nazis sought to destroy entirely.

Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, Israel

UNESCO's mission is to contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information. UNESCO believes that it is essential to learn about the Holocaust to better understand the causes of Europe's descent into genocide; the subsequent development of international law and institutions designed to prevent and punish genocide; and that the careful comparison with other examples of mass violence may contribute to the prevention of future genocides and mass atrocities.

UNESCO Headquarters in Paris
© UNESCO/Michel Ravassard



A CENTURY OF GENOCIDE

Dr Raphael Lemkin, who coined the word
"Genocide"
© UN Photo



Regardless of geographical location, all human cultures, over the course of time, have engaged in the killing of other humans. As the power of weapons of destruction has grown, so have the number of people killed by other human beings. Alongside the genocide of European Jewry, Nazi Germany also carried out a genocide of the Roma (a crime sometimes called the Porajmos, "Great Devouring", or Samudaripen, "Great Dying"), a mass murder of the Poles, and a mass killing programme of the disabled. They committed mass murder of more than three million Soviet prisoners of war, killed countless civilians in occupied territories, and murdered tens of thousands more through persecution of political opponents, homosexuals and Jehovah's Witnesses. So traumatic was this assault on human values, a new word was coined during World War II by a Polish-Jewish lawyer, Raphael Lemkin, to describe it: genocide.

According to Article 2 of the **United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide**, adopted in 1948, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) killing members of the group;
- (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Lemkin fashioned the word “genocide” by combining *geno-*, from the Greek word for race or tribe, with *-cide*, from the Latin word for killing.

Although the victorious nations in 1945 yearned for the end of such crimes and crafted an international agreement aimed at preventing future acts of genocide (The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948), other genocides and mass atrocities have occurred in various parts of the world since the end of World War II. As genocidal acts have unfolded over time, politicians, scholars, and concerned citizens around the world have made reference to the history and the “lessons” of the Holocaust in attempting to explain how humanity has once again failed to prevent genocide. What can be learned about preventing genocide and mass atrocities through study of the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes?

What can be learned about preventing genocide and mass atrocities through study of the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes?



Mass grave in Rwanda
© IRIBA Centre / Danièle Lacourse


PRÉFECTURE D'INDRE-&-LOIRE

Carte d'identité

JUIVE *veille*

Signature du titulaire : *Anny Horowitz*

Empreinte digitale :



Nom : HOROWITZ
Prénoms : Anny- Yolande
Profession : sans
Né le 22 Juin 1933
à STRASBOURG
Département d u Bas Rhin
Domicile : 21, rue Rode - BORDEAUX (Gironde)

A TOURS , le 4 Décembre 1940
Le Préfet,

Signalement :

Taille :	Nez : rec.
Cheveux : blond	Forme générale du visage : all.
Moustache :	Teint : rosé
Yeux : bleus	Corp. : moy.
Signes particuliers :	



Anny Horowitz, deported to Auschwitz from France at the age of nine on 11 September 1942
© Mémorial de la Shoah/CDJC

Examining this history can heighten the awareness of the danger of genocide in the contemporary world and bring to the fore an appreciation for individual rights and universal values.

THE HOLOCAUST WAS A DEFINING HISTORICAL MOMENT

Teaching and learning about the Holocaust calls attention to universal issues that are central in UNESCO's efforts to promote peace and mutual understanding. The Holocaust was a defining moment in human history. Historians explain that the Holocaust has the characteristics that appear in other genocides (e.g., a specific victim group or groups, mass violence against that group, and deprivation of the essentials for human existence), but that it also contains elements that cannot be found prior to its occurrence. For instance, it was the intention of the Nazis to murder each and every Jew in the territories under their domination. Furthermore, the genocide of the Jewish people served no pragmatic purpose. While other genocides and mass atrocities often have economic, political, or military motivations, the murder of the Jews had none of these incentives. Their destruction was based on a racist ideology that held that "Race is the decisive and moulding force in the life of nations. Language, culture, customs, piety, traditions, lifestyle, but also laws, governmental forms and economies, the whole variety of life is racially determined" (Der Reichsführer SS/SS Hauptamt, *Rassenpolitik*, Berlin, 1943). Races, to Nazi theoreticians, were also hierarchical, meaning that some races were superior and others were deemed "parasitic", justifying their murder. This was unprecedented in history. These theories deny the very principles that UNESCO was created to foster: equality, respect for justice without regard to race, gender, religion or language. Examining this history can heighten the awareness of the danger of genocide in the contemporary world and bring to the fore an appreciation for individual rights and universal values.

"Whether you live in Central Africa, China, the South Pacific, or Switzerland, you have to be aware of the danger that genocide presents. Education about the Holocaust ultimately means to remove humanity as far away as possible from that extreme form of mass murder."

Yehuda Bauer, Historian,
UNESCO, 31 January 2012

GENOCIDE IS NOT INEVITABLE

Man-made catastrophes are not accidents of history but can be prevented

Genocides occur because people and governments make decisions that perpetuate discrimination and persecution. When focusing on those political choices, students gain valuable insights into the making of history. For instance, by exploring why governments throughout Europe and the Americas restricted immigration just when oppression against Jews became greatest, students realize that political decisions can have horrific consequences. When later examining other instances of genocide and crimes against humanity, they understand that man-made catastrophes are not accidents of history but can be prevented.

When studying the Holocaust carefully, one gains an intense appreciation for its

complexity and realizes that events cannot be simply explained but are the result of multiple historical, economic, religious and political factors. In turn, this contributes to the understanding that preventing genocide and mass atrocities can begin with the identification of warning signals.

© Mémorial de la Shoah/CDJC



A British cartoon reflecting the hopes that are placed in the Evian Conference—This meeting, to be at Evian, France, on Wednesday to arrange for the emigration of political refugees, was called at

the instigation of the President and Secretary Hull, and only Italy, out of thirty-three nations asked to join, refused to participate. Myron C. Taylor, industrialist, will represent the United States.



Nursing staff at the Hadamar
"euthanasia" centre, Germany
© Mémorial de la Shoah/CDJC

STATES AND CITIZENS HAVE RESPONSIBILITIES

A study of the Holocaust leads students to think about political responsibilities and explore the functioning of governmental structures. The Holocaust was a State enterprise legitimized by the law. Its study clearly raises questions of the use and abuse of political power for violent purposes on a national level and, ultimately, on an international level. For instance, an understanding of the role of governmental and quasi-governmental organizations such as the S.A. or the S.S. paramilitary units



Vinnitza, Ukraine, German soldiers watching an Einsatzgruppen soldier murder a Jew, July 1941
© Yad Vashem

in attacking and almost destroying the Jewish population, not only of Germany but of most of Europe, will raise awareness about the roles and responsibilities of the State, of individuals and of society as a whole in the face of increasing human rights violations. An examination of the actions of German doctors and nurses in the so-called "Operation T4" euthanasia program of Nazi Germany (which led to the killing of more than 200,000 mentally or physically disabled men, women, and children over six years) is another example. Likewise, the participation of regular German soldiers in the killing of over one million Jews as part of the work of the Einsatzgruppen (special killing squads) in the eastern parts of Europe, leads to questioning human behaviour, conformism and the power of ideologies; in short, the adhesion of a society to a government undertaking actions that violate internationally recognized human rights. Educating about the Holocaust can help young people to understand key concepts that will be useful when studying other examples of mass violence. When pupils explore the history of other massive human rights violations, they will be able to draw on their understanding of the Holocaust and become more aware of their own responsibilities as global citizens.

The history of the Holocaust clearly addresses questions of the abuse of political power for violent purposes on a national level and, ultimately, an international level.

SILENCE CONTRIBUTES TO OPPRESSION

Doing nothing while others are being brutally oppressed by government actions is a form of complicity which, in the case of the Holocaust, resulted in making the work of collaborators more socially tolerable. While it has been convincingly shown that most people in Europe did not speak up against the brutality of the Nazi regime, a study of the impact of individuals or groups who did take action against it clearly shows the efficacy of speaking up for the rights of others. The most illuminating example is that of those thousands of non-Jews who risked their lives during the Holocaust to save Jews from being murdered: hiding them, providing false papers, rescuing children or helping people to escape. Rescuers and helpers took action with courage and humanity despite tremendous danger and, in contrast to the indifference of the rest of the population, refused to stand by while fellow human beings were being persecuted.

On another level, this power of action can be seen for instance in the deeds of some religious leaders to challenge the “T4 euthanasia” policy of the Nazi leadership to murder disabled people in the German Reich. Remarkable also are the actions of the non-Jewish German women who, in February 1943, protested against the arrest of their Jewish husbands in the so-called “Rosenstrasse” demonstrations. Their protests intensified until the men were released in March 1943. These examples demonstrate that constructive individual and collective action can sometimes positively influence oppressive regimes that deny their citizens basic human rights.



Chiune Sempo Sugihara, the Consul General of Japan in Kovno, issued more than 2,000 visas, thus helping Jewish refugees escape Europe.
© Yad Vashem

Doing nothing while others are being brutally oppressed by government actions is a form of complicity which, in the case of the Holocaust, resulted in making the work of collaborators more socially tolerable.

PREJUDICE AND RACISM HAVE ROOTS

Given the fact that genocide, mass atrocities and human rights violations are historical and contemporary realities in the twenty-first century, a careful study of the Holocaust will lead to a sharper understanding of the political, economic, and social ramifications of the many faces of prejudice. The identification of groups as “others”, their stereotyping, stigmatization, de-humanization and ultimate destruction can be seen not only in the treatment of Jews and the Roma by the Nazis, but also in the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda (1994) or the ideologically-driven class warfare of the genocide in Cambodia (1975-1979). Teaching and learning about the Holocaust can sensitize students to the position of minorities. An analysis of the mechanisms that led to the Holocaust can help them realize the importance of accepting and appreciating diversity rather than seeing it as a cause for discord.

“My understanding of genocide is that it is an extreme form of identity-related conflict stemming not from the mere differences between groups, but from the implications of those differences, reflected in gross inequalities, discrimination, marginalization, exclusion, stigmatization, de-humanization and denial of fundamental rights. The most effective form of prevention is therefore constructive management of diversity to promote equality, inclusivity, respect for fundamental rights and observance of democratic values and practices.”

Francis Deng, Special Adviser of the United Nations Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, End of Assignment Note, 2012



Rooted in ancient theological anti-Judaism, prejudice against or hatred of Jews, known as antisemitism, has taken new forms in the modern era.

© Mémorial de la Shoah/CDJC

ANTISEMITISM

The Nazi targeting of the Jews, under the guise of racial theory, was not the first attack on this group of people. Rooted in ancient theological anti-Judaism, prejudice against or hatred of Jews, known as antisemitism, has taken new forms in the modern era. As Jews were granted equal rights, a political dimension was added to antisemitism, opposing equality. Also, with the emergence in the nineteenth century of pseudo-scientific racist theories, antisemitism became racially motivated. This long history of prejudice culminated with the Holocaust. However, hatred of Jews has persisted after the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis and remains a problem today, be it in the form of incitement to hatred, violence or Holocaust denial and distortion.

Birkenau, Poland.
A selection on the platform,
27/05/1944
© Public Domain

“If barbarity is
inherent in our
civilization, then the
purpose of educational
efforts is to reveal its
potential for savagery.”

Georges Bensoussan, *Auschwitz en
héritage?* Mille et une Nuits, Paris, 2003



MODERN TECHNOLOGY CAN BE ABUSED

A study of the Holocaust will demonstrate that perpetrators of mass violence will utilize the best available technology for destructive purposes in order to achieve their goals. Learned engineers and architects, many affiliated with established and well-respected businesses and firms, designed and built gas chambers that murdered millions of people in the Nazi industrial killing centres. More generally, genocidal events of the twentieth century were organized by nation states, planned by an established bureaucracy, facilitated by different parts of society and perpetrated by state-affiliated military groups using the most efficient means at their disposal to pursue their murderous policies.

The use of radios in the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda in spreading racist propaganda and helping killers to identify victims also makes this unmistakably clear. Such awareness of the power of technology can help students when examining contemporary issues of human rights violations which, in turn, can lead to political action to prevent such violations. This is important given the profound changes in technology over the past years.



The Auschwitz-Birkenau German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1979
© Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

TEACHING ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST PRESENTS CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO EDUCATORS

When it comes to studying the Holocaust, UNESCO's mandate to promote peace through education presents classroom teachers with important pedagogical opportunities and interesting challenges. The Holocaust is one of the most documented historical events and offers educators many prospects for creative and relevant lessons. An abundance of easily accessible primary sources (e.g. documents, photographs, maps, artefacts, diaries, and memoirs) together with the creation of a positive learning environment will go some way towards meeting the learning needs of all students.



© Aladdin Project

Eyewitnesses to History

Testimonies from survivors, bystanders or liberators, can add greatly to our understanding of history. Since there are Holocaust survivors in many parts of the world, inviting them in person or bringing their stories into the classroom through the use of technology enriches students' experiences. By listening to personal stories, students will discover a wide diversity of individual experiences of this history, and relate them to the collective dimension. They will be exposed to the lives of people before the Holocaust, emphasizing their cultural and historical dimensions and limiting the risk that students might perceive them uniquely as victims.

Creative and Meaningful Pedagogies

Although the subject can be daunting because of the very nature of genocide, the Holocaust has been shown to be successfully taught in numerous cultural environments. Classroom practices profoundly influence what students learn. Therefore, it is critical for educators to make meaningful choices when it comes to pedagogical strategies. Teaching about the Holocaust, genocide, or mass atrocities all require sensitivity and appreciation of the complexity of the subject. Educators should carefully select materials, written and visual, appropriate to their students' cognitive abilities and that honestly convey the history of the Holocaust without trivializing it.

Cross-Curricular Methodologies

Many educators have found a cross-curricular approach to this history to be immensely useful. Combining and utilizing accurate historical, literary, artistic, and musical materials provides a meaningful way for students to use knowledge learned in one context as a knowledge base in other contexts. For instance, after an historical study of Auschwitz, if students read Primo Levi's short stories, *Lilit e altri racconti*, they will be able to place them in a more meaningful context.

Anne Frank's first diary. The diaries of Anne Frank were included in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2009

© AFF Basel, CH/AFS Amsterdam, NL



Comparative Study of Genocides

Teaching about the Holocaust is a good starting point to study the history of genocides and crimes against humanity. Careful comparison of the Holocaust with other examples of mass violence can help students to identify common patterns in the genocidal



© Documentation Centre of Cambodia/Kalyanee Mam

process. It facilitates the understanding of specificities and differences between events of mass violence. However, while it is educationally valuable to conduct a comparative study of genocides, it is critically important not to attempt a comparison of suffering. Educators should concentrate on the various destructive policies carried out by Nazi Germany and its collaborators when undertaking a study of the Holocaust. When examining other genocides,



Exhibition of family portraits at Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum
©Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum/Paweł Sawicki

attention should be made to the policies particular to a given genocide. Comparing them structurally is the basis of comparative genocide studies. But no one can presume that the suffering of Holocaust victims was any greater than the suffering of those murdered in other genocides, nor should any hierarchy of genocides be asserted. Every example of mass violence, including the Holocaust, should be

understood in its own terms, not diminished, trivialized or negated.

Contemplating the pedagogical concerns facing educators when it comes to teaching about the Holocaust, one can foresee educational outcomes that are reflected in the goals of UNESCO. Discrimination, stigmatization and denial of fundamental rights of groups have the potential to escalate into gross violations of human rights and genocide if preventive measures are not taken early on. Education is essential to better understand the causes and warning signs of genocide and mass violence, and to strengthen efforts at genocide prevention.

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST AND OTHER GENOCIDES

Given the international audiences that UNESCO addresses, electronic resources, accessible worldwide, are a convenient and economically sound source of information on the topics of the Holocaust, genocide, and mass atrocities. However, it is vitally important to access accurate and historically correct information on the Internet. Many of the following websites provide reliable information in several language versions.

www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/human-rights-education/holocaust-remembrance

The website of UNESCO is a good place to begin an exploration of Holocaust and human rights education. It provides an international structural framework for examining the connection between the Holocaust and genocide and human rights issues.

www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance

Detailed information on the United Nations Outreach Programme about the Holocaust can be found at this website. Educational materials as well as professional development opportunities are presented.

<http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/index.shtml>

Website of the Office of the United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide.

www.holocausttaskforce.org/education.html

The website of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research contains much practical information on all aspects of Holocaust education. In addition, it contains information on "The Holocaust and Other Genocides".

www.ushmm.org

The website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has extensive in-depth historical information about the Holocaust. It provides easy access to primary source documents, including photographs and maps that deal with the Holocaust. It also has broad information on genocide and mass atrocities.

www.yadvashem.il.org

The world's largest repository of information on the Holocaust, Yad Vashem's website provides easy access to digital collections, e-learning for professionals, a database of Shoah victims' names, and a wealth of historical information in several languages.

www.memorialdelashoah.org

The Shoah Memorial provides access to various resources on the Holocaust, mostly in French. It includes a website for primary-school children: www.grenierdesarah.org and for secondary school teachers: www.enseigner-histoire-shoah.org

www.memorial-museums.net

An online overview of institutions throughout the world that deal with the history of the Holocaust, created by the Topography of Terror Foundation in Berlin, Germany.

www.projetaladin.org

The website of Project Aladdin, a multi-faceted cultural initiative launched under the patronage of UNESCO with the aim of countering Holocaust denial and all forms of racism and intolerance, while promoting intercultural dialogue, particularly among Muslims and Jews. In English, French, Arabic, Turkish and Farsi.

www.annefrank.org

The Anne Frank House is an independent organization entrusted with the care of the Secret Annexe, the place where Anne Frank went into hiding during World War II and where she wrote her diary. It brings her life story to the attention of people all over the world to encourage them to reflect on the dangers of antisemitism, racism and discrimination and the importance of freedom, equal rights and democracy. The website annefrankguide.net is available in 22 languages and country versions.

www.dornsife.usc.edu/vhi

The USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education holds the largest archive of testimonies of Holocaust survivors in the world. It provides access to a large number of video testimonies, lesson plans for teachers, various pedagogical resources. It includes also a section of testimonies of survivors of Armenia, Rwanda and Cambodia.

www.ioe.ac.uk/holocaust

The Institute of Education's Centre for Holocaust Education is the first institution to combine extensive national research into teaching and learning about the Holocaust with new programmes, materials and resources designed to meet these classroom challenges.

www.ctholocaust.co.za

A unique initiative on the African continent, the South African Holocaust and Genocide Foundation is dedicated to creating a more caring and just society in which human rights and diversity are respected and valued. Centres covered by the Foundation serve as memorials to the six million Jews who were killed in the Holocaust and all victims of Nazism, teach about the consequences of prejudice, racism and discrimination, and promote an understanding of the dangers of indifference, apathy and silence.

www.instituteforthestudyofgenocide.org

The Institute for the Study of Genocide, an independent non-profit organization chartered by the University of the State of New York, located at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York, provides a large webography on Genocide Studies, State Killings, and groups at risk, International Law and past genocides.

www.genocidewatch.org

Genocide Watch aims to build an international movement to prevent and stop genocide.

www.hrw.org

Human Rights Watch provides news, analysis, reports and a wide variety of resources on human rights issues worldwide.

The twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century has been a time of unparalleled instances of genocide and mass atrocities. The Herero, the Armenians, the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes, Stalinist crimes, Cambodia, East Timor, Rwanda, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Darfur, Democratic Republic of the Congo . . . the list goes on.

Through UNESCO, it is possible to develop a greater understanding of the roots of mass violence and genocide. A study of the Holocaust can assist us in this endeavour as we continue to explore the complex factors that permit governments and individuals to perpetrate crimes against humanity.

The Holocaust was a turning point in human history. Understanding the genocide of the Jewish people and other crimes perpetrated by the Nazi regime remains of great significance in the modern world.

Regardless of where we live or who we are, learning about this universal history can help engage students in a critical reflection about the roots of genocide and the necessity to nurture peace and human rights to prevent such atrocities in the future.

This short introduction provides an essential overview on education about the Holocaust that can support policymakers, educators and students alike in their understanding of genocide and why it is vital that we continue to teach about the Holocaust today.



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