



# FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES

People make choices. Choices make history.

## A Note on Teaching Emotionally Challenging Content

Facing History and Ourselves explores some of the most troubling moments in US and World History, times when neighbor turned on neighbor to the point where the unimaginable happened, including genocide. We examine these troubling moments in history not to memorialize them and certainly not relive them, but to understand human behavior and decision-making.

We revisit disturbing histories like the Holocaust to learn the patterns of exclusion, to recognize the warning signs, and to prevent future human rights violations that can ultimately lead to such atrocities. We urge teachers to create safe spaces for students to have a range of reactions and emotions. This might include time for silent reflection or writing journals, as well as structured discussions to help student's process content together.

It is also important to note<sup>1</sup> that our experience suggests that it is often problematic to use graphic images and films or to use simulations to help students understand aspects of this history. Such resources and activities can traumatize some students, desensitize others, or trivialize the history (p.4).

Furthermore, Facing History strongly believes that neither adolescents nor anyone else who has not lived in such horrific times can imagine what it was like to be victims or perpetrators of the most hideous acts in human history. Such role-playing does not help us understand the choices that people faced, and detracts from history's consequences and legacy. **We never recommend placing students in the roles of perpetrators.**

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<sup>1</sup> Facing History and Ourselves. *Holocaust and Human behavior*. Brookline, MA: Facing History and Ourselves, 2017, 4.