

# Teaching about the Holocaust

## Questions of Rationale

Because the objective of teaching any subject is to engage the intellectual curiosity of the student in order to inspire critical thought and personal growth, it is helpful to structure your lesson plan on the Holocaust by considering throughout questions of rationale. Before deciding what and how to teach, we recommend that you contemplate the following:

- Why should students learn this history?
- What are the most significant lessons students should learn from a study of the Holocaust?
- Why is a particular reading, image, document, or film an appropriate medium for conveying the lessons about the Holocaust that you wish to teach?

Among the various rationales offered by educators who have incorporated a study of the Holocaust into their various courses and disciplines are

- The Holocaust was a watershed event, not only in the twentieth century but also in the entire history of humanity.
- Study of the Holocaust assists students in developing an understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping in any society. It helps students develop an awareness of the value of pluralism and encourages tolerance of diversity in a pluralistic society.
- The Holocaust provides a context for exploring the dangers of remaining silent, apathetic, and indifferent in the face of others' oppression.
- Holocaust history demonstrates how a modern nation can utilize its technological expertise and bureaucratic infrastructure to implement destructive policies ranging from social engineering to genocide.
- A study of the Holocaust helps students think about the use and abuse of power and the roles and responsibilities of individuals, organizations, and nations when confronted with civil rights violations and/or policies of genocide.

- As students gain insight into the many historical, social, religious, political, and economic factors that cumulatively resulted in the Holocaust, they gain awareness of the complexity of the subject and a perspective on how a convergence of factors can contribute to the disintegration of democratic values. Students come to understand that it is the responsibility of citizens in a democracy to learn to identify the danger signals and to know when to react.

When you, as an educator, take the time to consider the rationale for your lesson on the Holocaust, you will be more likely to select content that speaks to your students' interests and that provides them with a clearer understanding of a complex history. Most students demonstrate a high level of interest in studying the Holocaust precisely because the subject raises questions of fairness, justice, individual identity, peer pressure, conformity, indifference, and obedience—issues that adolescents confront in their daily lives. Students are also affected by and challenged to comprehend the magnitude of the Holocaust; they are particularly struck by the fact that so many people allowed this genocide to occur by failing either to resist or to protest.