

International Holocaust Remembrance Day

A framework for history, belonging
and academic connection



Fayette County
Public Schools

History

International Holocaust Remembrance Day is observed globally every year on Jan. 27. It is a designated international day of commemoration to honor the 6 million Jewish victims of the Holocaust and millions of other victims of Nazi persecution, including Roma and Sinti, people with disabilities, Soviet prisoners of war, political dissidents, Jehovah's Witnesses, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

The date holds deep historical significance: on Jan. 27, 1945, the Soviet Red Army entered and liberated the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp, the largest and most lethal factory of mass murder operated by Nazi Germany. The day was formally established in November 2005 by the United Nations General Assembly under Resolution 60/7. The resolution came during the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the camps. It explicitly rejects any denial of the Holocaust as a historical event, either in whole or in part, and mandates that member states develop educational programs to instill the lessons of the Holocaust in future generations to help prevent future acts of genocide.

Core Concepts & Identification

The Holocaust (Shoah): The systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jewish people by the Nazi regime and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. "Shoah" is the Hebrew word for "catastrophe" or "utter destruction."

Antisemitism: The historical and contemporary prejudice, discrimination, hatred, or hostility directed against Jewish people simply because they are Jewish. Antisemitism served as the core ideological foundation for Nazi policy.

The Universal Theme: Each year, organizations like the United Nations and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) select a specific theme focusing on memory, dignity, and historical preservation. A global rallying cry tied to this day is "Never Again" ("Never Forget"), emphasizing collective civic responsibility.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day

A framework for history, belonging
and academic connection



Fayette County
Public Schools

Barriers To Belonging

Invisible Barriers

- **Trauma Transmission and Vulnerability:** For Jewish students and educators, discussions around the Holocaust are not merely ancient history; they often involve personal, intergenerational family trauma. Facing explicit imagery, graphic accounts, or casual classroom jokes regarding concentration camps can trigger profound psychological distress and isolation.
- **The Rise of Contemporary Antisemitism:** International Holocaust Remembrance Day frequently occurs against a backdrop of rising modern antisemitic incidents in schools. When the Holocaust is taught as an isolated, historic event without acknowledging that antisemitic tropes and conspiracy theories still persist today, Jewish students may feel unsafe reporting contemporary biases.
- **Marginalization via Competing Narratives:** Students from diverse backgrounds can sometimes feel their own communities' historical traumas are being overlooked when a school highlights the Holocaust. It is vital to frame the day not as a hierarchy of suffering, but as a specific entry point to understanding the universal mechanics of prejudice and state-sponsored violence.

Common Misconceptions

- **"The Holocaust happened suddenly overnight":** Students often believe the mass murder began instantly in 1933. In reality, the Holocaust was a gradual process that started with words, legal discrimination (such as the Nuremberg Laws), propaganda, economic exclusion, and social isolation before escalating to physical violence and industrial slaughter.
- **"Only Adolf Hitler and the SS were responsible":** This minimizes the vast network of complicity. The execution of the Holocaust relied heavily on ordinary citizens, civil servants, railroad employees, doctors, judges, and international bystanders who actively participated or silently acquiesced to the regime's actions.
- **"All concentration camps were the same":** There was a distinct structural difference between transit camps, forced-labor camps, and purpose-built extermination camps (or "death camps" like Treblinka and Auschwitz-Birkenau) designed solely for mass execution.

Common Microaggressions

- **Casual jokes about Nazis, gas chambers, or Hitler:** Using Holocaust-related imagery or gestures as edgy humor minimizes the systematic murder of millions and creates a hostile learning environment.
- **"Why can't people just move on from it?":** This dismisses the permanent demographic, cultural, and emotional scars left on the global Jewish population, which only recently began approaching pre-1939 population levels.
- **Comparing everyday modern inconveniences to the Holocaust:** Likening school rules, political figures, or minor public policies to Nazi Germany or the Gestapo dilutes the gravity of actual totalitarianism and genocide.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day

A framework for history, belonging
and academic connection



Fayette County
Public Schools

Education Connections

Alignment with FCPS Portrait of a Graduate

- **Critical Thinker:** Analyzing how the Nazi regime used democratic systems, legal frameworks, and mass propaganda to dehumanize a minority population trains students to critically evaluate media literacy, identify disinformation, and spot early warning signs of democratic erosion.
- **Effective Communicator:** Engaging with primary sources—such as diaries, letters, and video testimonies—requires students to practice deep empathetic listening and learn to articulate complex ethical ideas surrounding human rights and moral choices.
- **Empowered Learner:** Investigating the diverse ways individuals resisted Nazi tyranny (such as through spiritual resistance, underground school systems in ghettos, or physical partisan warfare) empowers students to understand agency even under the most oppressive conditions.
- **Creative Problem Solver:** Evaluating the roles of historic "upstanders" (like diplomats who forged visas or citizens who hid families) challenges students to consider how innovative, courageous, and strategic actions can save human lives during global crises.
- **Collaborative Team Member:** Participating in structured civic dialogue about human rights encourages students to collaborate across diverse identities to build inclusive, safe communities that actively stand against prejudice.

KY Standards Alignment

- **Social Studies / World History:** Trace the collapse of the Weimar Republic and examine how economic instability, nationalism, and institutionalized racism culminated in the execution of the "Final Solution".
- **Civics / Government:** Analyze the post-WWII Nuremberg Trials to evaluate how international law, concepts of "crimes against humanity," and universal human rights frameworks were legally established and enforced.
- **Reading / ELA:** Pair classic Holocaust literature—such as Elie Wiesel's "Night" or Anne Frank's "The Diary of a Young Girl" — with modern poetry or testimonies to analyze how authors navigate memory, trauma, and identity through literary structure.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day

A framework for history, belonging
and academic connection



Fayette County
Public Schools

Resources

Primary (K-5)

- Focus: Core Values, Upstander Behavior, & Celebrating Differences.
- Resources: Age-appropriate literature from the PJ Library or books like “The Number on My Grandfather's Arm” by David A. Adler and “The Whispering Town” by Jennifer Elvgren.
- Curriculum Idea: Focus on foundational civic concepts: What does it mean to be a good neighbor? How do we use our voices to protect someone who is being treated unfairly? Use stories of rescue and empathy to meet reading comprehension goals without exposing young minds to graphic details of violence.
 - Inclusion Tip: Avoid introducing graphic imagery or detailed descriptions of mass violence to primary students. Focus instead on human dignity, the danger of bullying, and the importance of inclusion.

Secondary (6-12)

- Focus: Historical Context, Systemic Dehumanization, & Contemporary Application.
- Resources: Comprehensive curricula from Facing History and Ourselves, primary source archives from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), and testimonies from The USC Shoah Foundation.
- Curriculum Idea: Use the "Universe of Obligation" framework from Facing History and Ourselves to have students analyze how societies define who belongs, who is protected by law, and what happens when those boundaries are stripped away.
 - Inclusion Tip: Use "Socratic Seminars" or structured silent discussions (like a Big Paper strategy) to process heavy historical topics. This allows students space to reflect deeply, debate civilly, and process emotional content without pressure. Always monitor classroom dynamics to ensure conversations remain respectful and grounded in historical evidence.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM): [ushmm.org](https://www.ushmm.org)

Yad Vashem (The World Holocaust Remembrance Center): [yadvashem.org](https://www.yadvashem.org)