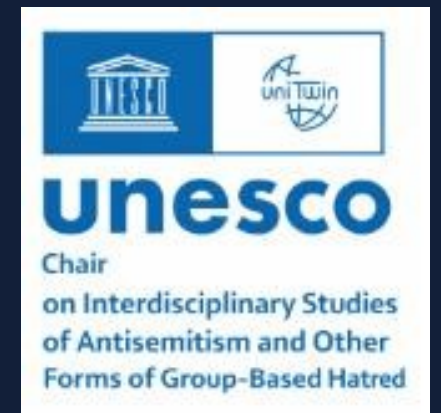


HOLOCAUST EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Tools for addressing resistance, dehumanisation and emotional overload in Holocaust education

A step-by-step guide for teachers and educators

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Other Forms of Intergroup Hatred



Why were these tools developed?

According to a report by the KARTA Centre Foundation, teachers lack the tools to deal with pupils' difficult emotions, as well as materials illustrating the mechanisms of manipulation and disinformation. This collection of teaching tools addresses these needs, supporting work on resistance, prejudice and students' emotional overload.

84.6%

of teachers lack tools for deal with pupils' difficult emotions

60.4%

believe that their degree course did not prepare them to deal with emotions in the classroom

70%

report a lack of materials illustrating the mechanisms of manipulation and disinformation

Guidelines for lessons on the Holocaust: why a contract?

When teaching about the Holocaust, pupils may breach the rules — consciously or unconsciously — through jokes, offensive comparisons, hate speech or provocative questions. Simply saying ‘you mustn’t’ is often not enough. That is why it is worth establishing the rules of discussion in advance in the form of a contract.

What is a contract?

A set of rules governing interactions within the group, the manner of communication and the subject area of the work.

Why does it work?

It makes it easier to refer to previously agreed rules when tension arises in the classroom or a comment is made that undermines someone’s dignity.

An additional benefit

It reduces pupils’ interpersonal uncertainty, i.e. it increases their readiness to cooperate and share their emotions openly.

Characteristics of a good contract

- 1 Short, specific and clear — there is little time to teach about the Holocaust
- 2 Written in plain language, using positive phrasing (it describes desired behaviours, not prohibitions)
- 3 Discussed with pupils — encouraging them to ask questions and suggest changes
- 4 Approved by the class, e.g. by a show of hands
- 5 Appropriate for the pupils' age — older pupils understand abstract concepts better, whilst younger ones need examples

How do you introduce a contract in the classroom?

When should you introduce it?

- At the start of the lesson
- In detail during a lesson on the Holocaust
- As a general contract at the start of the term or academic year

What should you tell the pupils?

- Openly announce the introduction of the contract and explain what it is
- Example: “We’ll be following a contract in today’s lesson. I’d like to present it to you and ask if you have anything to add.”

Checking understanding and enforcing the contract

How can you make sure the pupils have understood?

- Ask the pupils for their views directly or ask them to raise their hands to indicate they've understood
- "Which rule do you think should be the most important?"
- "Should any of these rules be worded differently?"

How to ensure compliance?

- If a rule is broken: remind the class that agreed on a contract at the start of the lesson, and point out the specific rule
- In the event of persistent resistance from the class: set out clear consequences for breaching the contract that directly relate to behaviour

Proposed contract for pupils

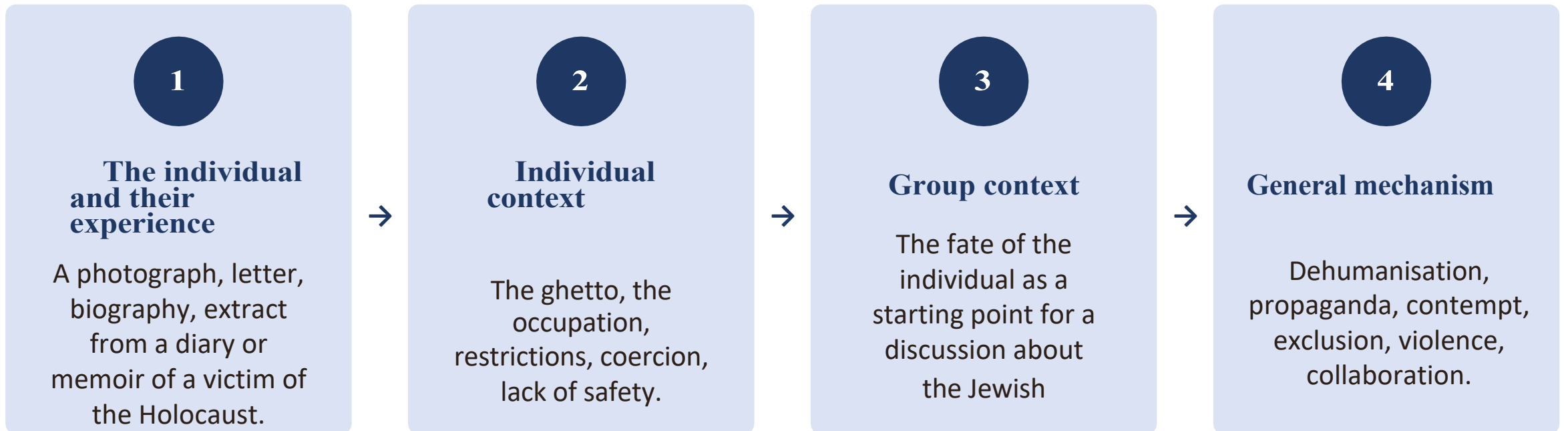
PRIMARY SCHOOLS	SECONDARY SCHOOLS
Our lessons focus on the history of the Holocaust*	Our lessons focus on the history of the Holocaust*
We talk about people who really lived and their stories	We talk about real people, their experiences and events
We explain our views and check where our information comes from	We distinguish facts from opinions, and base our statements on evidence
We ask questions when we don't understand something and want to find out more	We ask questions out of curiosity, respect or genuine ignorance
We treat everyone with respect, regardless of their appearance, background or suffering	We use neutral, respectful language
We remember that our situation is different from that of people who lived in the past	We are cautious about historical comparisons and avoid comparing historical events to the present

** In the case of a general contract, the first point may be omitted or replaced with the statement 'our lessons concern history'.*

STEP 3

Gradual introduction of challenging content

An excess of demanding stimuli can lead to overload — particularly when the content exceeds the pupils' current cognitive, empathic or moral capacities of the pupils. It is therefore advisable to introduce challenging content step by step.



EXAMPLE OF APPLICATION

Case study: the story of Hédi Fried

1 · STARTING WITH THE INDIVIDUAL

Hédi Fried was born in Syhot in 1924 in Transylvania. She had a younger sister, Livi, and came from a Jewish family.

2 · INDIVIDUAL CONTEXT

A memory from a school trip to the post office: the schoolgirls were to learn Morse code. The visit was cut short when the postmaster asked if they were all Romanian — the teacher replied that not all of them were.

Questions for the pupils: ‘What was the purpose of Hédi’s visit to the post office?’ · ‘What emotions did she experience?’ · ‘Which question led to the visit being cut short?’

3 · GROUP CONTEXT

Following the annexation of Northern Transylvania by Hungary in 1940, the Nuremberg Laws were introduced: Jews were dismissed from public office, and schools and universities were closed to them. In 1944, Hédi and her family were sent to the ghetto in Syhot, from where over 3,000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz.

4 · ANALYSING THE MECHANISMS

Nazi propaganda labelled Jews ‘vermin’ and compared them to a disease — dehumanising language intended to justify violence and exclusion.

Questions for pupils: “What inhuman terms are used to describe Jews in the text?” · “What emotions are they intended to evoke?” · “Why call people such things?”

STEP 4

The role of factual knowledge in safeguarding mental wellbeing

History education based on empathy requires reliable factual knowledge — it helps to avoid emotional overload and historicism (judging the past by contemporary standards). An excessive focus on the suffering of victims can overwhelm pupils emotionally and hinder their learning.

The role of difficult emotions

Engaging with difficult emotions can foster the development of empathy and a better understanding of other people's experiences.

The risk of overprotection

Overprotection from challenging content may limit pupils' understanding of emotions.

The risk of excessive exposure

An excess of challenging content leads to overload — the pupil focuses on their own discomfort rather than on the other person's situation.

Social skills

The development of empathy supports peer relationships, a child's self-esteem and social functioning.

Regular reference to factual information

Questions worth asking pupils at every stage of knowledge progression.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR PUPILS	FUNCTION
<i>What do we know for certain about this person?</i>	Distinguishes facts from speculation
<i>Where does this information come from?</i>	Teaches how to work with sources
<i>When and where did this happen?</i>	Places the story in a neutral context
<i>What factors influenced this person's life and choices?</i>	Prevents us from judging victims from today's perspective
<i>What does this person's story tell us about broader historical processes?</i>	Links the biography to the historical context
<i>What is worth remembering as a fact, and what was our emotional reaction?</i>	It distinguishes between cognitive and emotional perception

STEP 5

Dehumanisation — what is it and how should we respond to it?

Dehumanisation is a way of thinking and speaking that strips people of their full humanity.

Its aim is to create distance from a group or individual and to diminish the sense of responsibility for the way they are treated.

When people are portrayed as a crowd, animals or objects, it becomes easier to justify violence, exclusion or indifference towards them.

Dehumanisation also appears in jokes, memes, insults and 'off-the-cuff' comments. Statements comparing people to 'vermin' or a 'plague' may seem to pupils like a humorous exaggeration — yet such language has a long history as a tool of dehumanisation.

Forms of dehumanisation and ways of responding

TYPE	EXAMPLE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE HOLOCAUST	HOW TO RESPOND
Deindividuation	Referring to people as ‘transports’, ‘numbers’ or ‘a crowd’	Restoring the individual perspective — names, biographies, photographs, letters
Animalisation	Terms such as ‘vermin’; referring to body parts using animal names	Highlighting the reductionism of this way of thinking; reflecting on the role of animalisation
Mechanisation	Referring to victims as cargo, material or labour	Highlighting the reductionism; reflecting on the role of mechanisation in dehumanisation
Biologisation	Referring to Jews as a race or a threat biological	Explaining the role of pseudoscience and racism; reflection on the issue of eugenics

SUMMARY

Five steps for tackling difficult historical topics

- 1 Establish a class contract — clear, positive rules
- 2 Implement it thoughtfully: when, how, and how to enforce it
- 3 Introduce difficult content gradually: individual → group → mechanism
- 4 Base your narrative on facts, whilst safeguarding pupils' wellbeing
- 5 Teach pupils to recognise dehumanisation and respond to its various forms

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