



HOLOCAUST STUDIES PROGRAM

# BEARING WITNESS

An educator's guide for teaching the  
Holocaust while traveling with students

“FOR THE DEAD AND THE LIVING  
WE MUST BEAR WITNESS.”

—ELIE WIESEL



Exceptional Educational Journeys

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brendan Murphy has taught history at Marist School in Atlanta since 1994. In 1996, he developed a Holocaust seminar, titled "Bearing Witness", which featured a visit to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Now in its 18th year, "Bearing Witness" has evolved to include a class trip to Europe, seminars for parents and collaborative projects with foundations dedicated to Holocaust remembrance.

Murphy has been recognized for excellence with the Teacher of the Year Award from the University of Notre Dame, the Unsung Hero Award from the Anti-Defamation League, the Class Act Award from 11 Alive News, the Goizueta Chair of Excellence Award, and Distinguished Educator of 2009 and 2016 by the Georgia Commission on the Holocaust.

As director of Bearing Witness, Brendan assists Catholic school educators with the training and resources necessary to teach about the Holocaust and antisemitism. He is currently director of Peace by Piece, an organization which works to promote respect and understanding among Jewish, Christian and Muslim high school students. He has participated in programs and fellowships with the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the Archdiocese of Atlanta.



## CREDITS

Guidelines for teaching the Holocaust are adapted from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Used with permission.

Student photographs taken by Brendan Murphy and used with permission.



# INTRODUCTION & RATIONALE

The crimes known as the Holocaust are an indelible stain on human history. The collective shame experienced for the utter degradation of the person should give rise to an authentic repentance and an acceptance of responsibility for promoting the dignity of each person in this our common home. There is a duty not only to study the history of the Holocaust but also to remember it, for there is no future without memory. Remembering what happened should rightly awaken the conscience of our students.

ACIS is proud to collaborate with Brendan Murphy of Marist School in Atlanta, Georgia to create a guide for educators who are traveling to Holocaust specific sites. Adapted from his Bearing Witness program, which includes a 9-day Holocaust remembrance tour, this guide is intended as a resource for teachers who wish to engage their students with the difficult topics of Nazi war crimes, genocide and antisemitism before, during, and after travel.

Inside you will find sample skills and objectives for your classroom, sample itineraries with suggested activities and a guide for discussing the Holocaust with students.

## OVERVIEW OF BEARING WITNESS PROGRAM

Bearing Witness is so named because in its original meaning, a witness is not only one who sees something but one who sees something and is changed by it. To study the history of the Holocaust is to become a witness to a story that reaches us in that place where truth is kept. It inspires our students to apply all their learning, insight and innate sympathy to the project of promoting understanding among different peoples, religions and cultures.

This unique Holocaust studies program, designed to expand learning beyond the limits of the classroom for 9-12 grade students, is set over an immersive nine-day trip to Munich, Prague and Krakow—cities chosen for their direct relation to the objectives and meaning of the Bearing Witness experience as much as for their astounding beauty and proximity. It should be noted that in addition to the story of the Holocaust this curriculum includes activities designed out of an appreciation for the unique history and culture of the German, Czech and Polish people.



**MUNICH**



**PRAGUE**



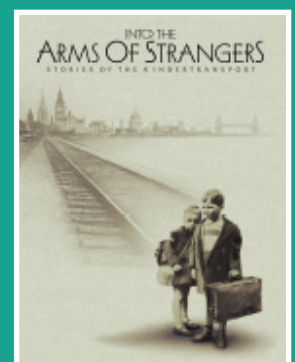
**KRAKÓW**

# SKILLS & OBJECTIVES

While the full Bearing Witness program covers all of the objectives below, the needs of your particular classroom or itinerary may vary. Selecting even just 3-4 learning objectives will help focus your lesson and promote discussion.

- Gain critical thinking skills by analyzing the history of the Holocaust through survivor testimony, Holocaust literature, art and poetry, and primary documents.
- Develop social and emotional skills with journal writing that enhances reflection, expresses feelings and facilitates critical thinking skills.
- Connect to the topic, reflect on their own experiences and explore alternative ways of thinking through guided small and large group discussions.
- Broaden their knowledge of the history of Jewish life in Europe including religious, architectural and cultural achievements as well as the long and tragic history of antisemitism.
- Gain an understanding of the impact and potential consequences of propaganda.
- Understand the roots and ramifications of prejudice, racism and stereotyping and see how remaining indifferent to the oppression and suffering of others in any society can perpetuate and enable hate.
- Appreciate how nations can leverage modern technologies and government bureaucracies to implement destructive policies.
- Think about the use and abuse of power.
- Understand how the Nazis came to power and recognize how democratic institutions are not automatically sustained, but need to be appreciated, nurtured and sustained.
- Create a Holocaust memorial and appreciate how societies commemorate and memorialize victims of the Holocaust and honor those who stood against it.
- Apprehend the occurrence of and reasons behind collaboration and complicity in genocide.
- Understand the motivations and limitations of resisters and rescuers.
- Improve communication and public speaking skills through individual presentations.
- Explain how totalitarian governments come to and maintain power.

## SUGGESTED PRE-TRIPVIEWING FOR STUDENTS



# SAMPLE ITINERARY:

## ACIS Holocaust Remembrance Tour

### DAY 1: OVERNIGHT FLIGHT

Departure from the United States.

### DAY 2: MUNICH

ACIS welcomes you to Germany's most exciting city. Get oriented at the Marienplatz, do some shopping and climb the spires of medieval churches.

### DAY 3: MUNICH

Morning mass at Michaelskirche followed by sightseeing including the Town Hall, the famous Glockenspiel, Odeonplatz and Residenz. Nearby the Residenz, you will also see copies of White Rose pamphlets that have been embedded in the pavement of Geschwister-Scholl- Platz outside the central hall of Ludwig-Maximilian University. This afternoon drive to the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial, a grim reminder of Nazi atrocities during WWII. Tonight enjoy dinner at the Hofbrauhaus.

### DAY 4: PRAGUE

Journey to Regensburg, which received little damage from the bombing during World War II and the nearly intact medieval city centre is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Explore the quaint town and cathedral before you depart for Prague.

### DAY 5: PRAGUE

This morning, take a guided tour of the immense Hradcany Castle complex with its Archbishop's Palace. In the afternoon, your Tour Manager accompanies you to the Prague Ghetto, which contains Europe's oldest Jewish cemetery, to visit the Old New Synagogue. The balance of the day is free to discover more of Prague at your own pace—promenade the 14th century Charles Bridge or keep your eyes open for local concerts.

### DAY 6: KRAKOW

Leave Prague and stop in Olomouc, one of the oldest and most important cities in Bohemia. Continue to the vibrant city of Krakow.



### DAY 7: KRAKOW

Today is a full day excursion to Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, a grim reminder of Nazi terror. Sack lunch is included today. Return to Krakow for dinner and overnight.

### DAY 8: KRAKOW

This morning you will visit Plaszow. Following there are visits to Wawel Castle Cathedral, this was once the residence of Polish monarchs during the 11th through the 17th centuries, and Oskar Schindler's Factory for a photo opportunity. In the afternoon explore the quarter known as Kazimierz, home to a thriving Jewish community from the 14th century until WWII, and the filming location for many scenes from Spielberg's Schindler's List. Enjoy a recap discussion (will be held in a hotel meeting room) of your trip after your final dinner in Poland.

**DAY 9:** Departure for return flight to the United States

VISIT [ACIS.COM/HRB](https://www.acis.com/hrb) TO LEARN MORE





# PRE-TRIP PREPARATIONS

To ensure a successful experience preparation must begin many months in advance and should include:

## 9-12 MONTHS OUT:

- Seek permission from your school principal or leadership team to offer the program at your school
- Collaborate with an ACIS representative to put the program together and figure out pricing
- Promote the Bearing Witness experience to your school community and hold a meeting for all interested parents and students. In addition to thoroughly describing the rationale and meaning behind the experience this meeting should also cover everything from the itinerary, cost, trip insurance, expectations for behavior and consequences for misbehavior, registration procedures, etc.

## 7-9 MONTHS OUT:

- Assign readings, films and develop lesson plans on the Holocaust for students

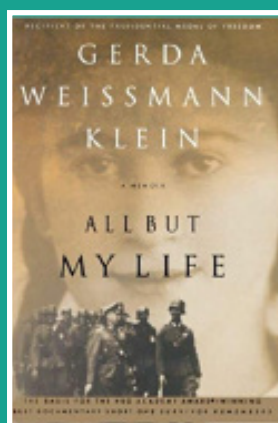
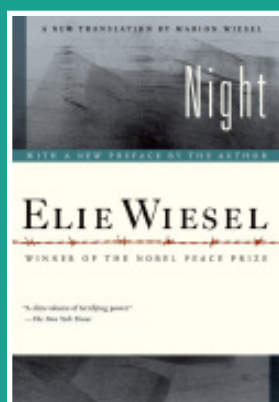
## 3-7 MONTHS OUT:

- Reach out to leaders in your community and beyond who you might want to write to the kids to offer their own understanding on why students should study the Holocaust, what lessons they should learn, etc.
- Organize a mini-seminar course on the Holocaust for parents
- Organize unit or course on the Holocaust to students

## 1-2 MONTHS OUT:

- Host a pre-trip meeting with students and parents to go over the logistics, expectations and questions
- Collect parent letters

## SUGGESTED PRE-TRIP READING FOR STUDENTS





# TRAVEL GUIDES & PRESENTATIONS

To ensure a greater level of ownership in the Bearing Witness experience students may participate in creating a travel guide for the group to highlight noteworthy historical and cultural attractions they will see on the trip both related and unrelated to the history of the Holocaust. Each student is assigned a topic and tasked with creating both the left and right hand pages for the travel guide on that topic. Below, for example, you can see two pages made by a student in the Bearing Witness program on the extraordinary St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague. Student pages are collected and bound into a book that they take with them on the trip. At the end of the book several blank pages can be left for students to sign each other's travel guide on the last night as a keepsake of the experience.

## St. Vitus Cathedral

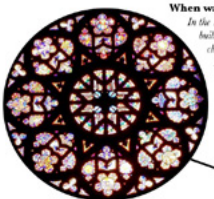
DAVID SHUGA

### Who was St. Vitus?

Tradition holds that St. Vitus, one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers of the Roman Catholic Church, was martyred in 365 under the reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian when the emperor was trying to stop the spread of Christianity. Because in medieval Germany peasants celebrated St. Vitus day by dancing at his statue, St. Vitus is considered the patron saint of dancers and entertainers. The construction of St. Vitus in Prague began in 925 when King Henry I of Germany presented as a gift the bones of our lord St. Vitus to Wenceslaus, Duke of Bohemia. St. Vitus has since been the patron saint of Bohemia. The image here shows his martyrdom.

### When was it built?

In the 10th century Wenceslaus I built a modest Romanesque chapel to house the holy relic of St. Vitus. Later when Bishopric of Prague was established a larger cathedral was needed. Construction began in 1344 under the direction of Matthias of Arras and later Peter Parler, whose unique ribbing vaults that support the three Gothic arches of the Golden Portal are visually inspiring. Work on the Cathedral continued after Parler's death and was halted during the Hussite War in the early 1400s. Work on the Cathedral continued off and on until it was finished in the early 1900s.



### The Rose Window

Designed by Frantisek Kysela in 1925-27, the window above the main entrance of the Cathedral depicts scenes of biblical creation and is shining when illuminated with sunlight from the outside.



Gargoyles  
Gargoyles spouts  
devotee the front  
facade.



### Alfons Mucha Window

The Cathedral contains many superb examples of 20th century Czech stained glass windows, notably St. Cyril and St. Methodius.



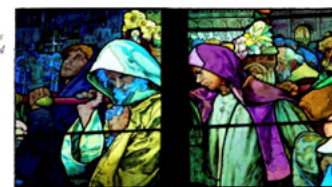
### Tomb of St. John Nepomuk

Crafted from solid silver in 1736, this elaborate tomb honors the saint who was drowned in the Vltava River in 1393 and is a national saint of the Czech Republic today.



### Chancel

The Chancel was built by Peter Parler starting in 1372. It is remarkable for the soaring height of its vault and the intimacy of the ribbed Gothic ceiling called the tracery.



### St. Wenceslas Chapel

Wenceslas, also known as Václav, was born the Duke of Bohemia near Prague in 903. While King of Bohemia he strengthened Christianity there and was known for his virtue and piety. He was later martyred by an anti-Christian faction near Prague. Canonized after his murder Wenceslas is the patron saint of the Czech people and the Czech Republic. His feast day, September 28, is a public holiday. Gothic frescoes with scenes from the Bible and the life of the saint cover the walls of the St. Wenceslas Chapel, interspersed with a patchwork of polished gemstones and fine gilding.



## POSSIBLE TOPICS FOR THE BOOK INCLUDE:

- **MUNICH:** Frauenkirche, Rathaus-Glockenspiel, Ohel Jakob Synagogue, St. Michael's Church, Marienplatz, etc.
- **DACHAU CONCENTRATION CAMP:** Church of the Mortal Agony of Christ, Jewish Memorial, International Monument, etc.
- **PRAGUE:** Charles Bridge, 27 Tributary Crosses, Church of Our Lady Before Tyn, Golem of Prague, Jan Hus Memorial, Prague Astronomical Clock, Old Jewish Cemetery, Pinkas Synagogue, Old New Synagogue, etc.
- **KRAKOW:** St. Mary's Basilica, Church of St. Adalbert, Wawel Castle, Plaszow Memorial, Eros Bendato, Adam Mickiewicz Monument, Altarpiece of Veit Stoss, Empty Chair Memorial, etc.

## INCLUDING THE PARENTS

The best journeys are never traveled alone but in the company and encouragement of those we love. Bearing Witness offers a unique opportunity for our students to journey through this history with the support of their parents.

### Ways to include the parents in the Bearing Witness experience include:

- **Letters:** A close study of the Holocaust is a heavy and emotional experience. It is often a comfort for the students to hear from their parents in a meaningful way while on the trip. Before the group leaves parents could write a letter to their son or daughter to be read at an appropriate time during the week as a surprise.
- **Readings and Films:** Parents should read the same books and see the same films as the students.
- **Parent Mini-Course:** Offer a short two or three night mini-course on the Holocaust for the parents.
- **Videos and Photos:** Create a video or photo log during the trip to share with parents back home during the trip.
- **Post-Trip Gathering:** Have a gathering of parents and students after the trip to share the experience.

Once students have researched, studied and created the travel guide pages for their topic they then act as a travel guide and give a brief presentation on their subject to their peers during the trip.

Presentations should be informative as well as interesting and even funny with stories and anecdotes.

To ensure a better connection with their audience, students should avoid reading directly from notes. If time allows presentations should also be practiced with the teacher ahead of time as a kind of quality control.

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## LETTERS FOR STUDENTS

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Understanding the meaning and lessons of the Holocaust is difficult for teenagers who don't always have the life experience to ponder "man's inhumanity to man." It can be helpful for students to hear varying perspectives on the subject from local and world leaders who have thought about the lessons and meaning of the Holocaust.

To that end teachers may wish to reach out to certain individuals from their communities and beyond and invite them to write to the Bearing Witness participants to offer their own understanding of why young people should study the Holocaust. The letters are then brought over to Europe and offered to the students at appropriate times throughout the trip. Such letters offer a perfect opportunity for students to journal and discuss. Moreover the letters also make a wonderful keepsake and remembrance of the Bearing Witness experience.

Individuals who have written to Bearing Witness students in the past include former presidents, senators, Holocaust survivors, artists, writers, journalists, museum directors, educators, State Department members, religious leaders, etc.

## QUOTES FROM ACTUAL LETTERS WRITTEN TO BEARING WITNESS PARTICIPANTS:

“

The lessons of the Holocaust are never far from home. I encourage you, when you return, to continue your reflection on this detrimental event and the corresponding lessons regarding the defense of humanity and social responsibility.”

**-MR. NATHAN DEAL, GOVERNOR OF GEORGIA**

“

Let us beware of having a prosecutor’s attitude in judging people in increasingly more distant times, because standing in Auschwitz we judge much more than any specific generation, we judge humanity. Therefore we also judge ourselves.”

**-DR. PIOTR M.A. CYWINSKI, DIRECTOR OF THE AUSCHWITZ-  
BIRKENAU STATE MUSEUM**

“

It is said the greatest journey starts at the heart. In the years to come you will have a chance to clear the mirage clouding the views, lift the veil of misconceptions and serve as a beacon of enlightenment to mankind. You are a gift of history to our legacy, to the core values of democracy and to our nation. One last mantra: you cannot change the past but you can change the future. There is a glow in serving a cause greater than oneself.”

**-MR. MURRAY LYNN, HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR**

## FROM A LETTER BY FORMER PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA TO BEARING WITNESS STUDENTS:



“As a free people we stated our convictions long ago. We believe that each of us is created equal with the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And for more than two centuries, we have fought to extend that fundamental promise fairness and opportunity to all our citizens. But even now we know our journey is not yet finished. We know from our own history that intolerance breeds injustice, whether it is based on race or religion, gender or sexual orientation.

We understand that we are stronger when all our people are granted opportunity.”

President Barack Obama delivers remarks at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., April 23, 2012. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)



# JOURNALING

Like all student trips, Bearing Witness is a very social experience for the students. They are with one another as a group throughout the entire trip. It is important students be given the time and opportunity to journal by themselves at appropriate times throughout Bearing Witness. Journal writing can facilitate and enhance reflection and critical thought in a safe and private space. Traveling to places like Dachau and Auschwitz can sometimes overwhelm and even frighten students who unlike adults lack the life experience to process the inhumanity, extreme brutality and death one confronts there. Writing down their thoughts and feelings can help students understand them more clearly and assist in alleviating anxiety and the emotional distress some students experience when visiting the memorials at Holocaust concentration and death camps. Moreover for the students their journals provide a great resource when it comes time for group discussions on Bearing Witness. They will be better prepared to discuss the thoughts and questions with their journals as a reference. Lastly keeping a journal creates a wonderful keepsake from the Bearing Witness experience that students will treasure for the rest of their lives.



Finding the appropriate time and space for journaling is easy. At Auschwitz, for example, before the student tour begins, teachers can discuss with the guides when they would like their students to journal and for how long. The guides are often very accommodating. Students should be given appropriate journal prompts that are general and open ended to allow for the freedom to write where their thoughts take them.

# BEARING WITNESS ITINERARY & ACTIVITIES

## DAY 1: OVERNIGHT FLIGHT

Departure from the United States.

- **Airport Game:** to help develop rapport and chemistry with your group develop an activity they can do together at the airport such as a scavenger hunt or other games.
- **Journal:** There are three journal writing assignments on this day. They can be done at the airport or on the plane but should be completed before arrival in Europe. First, have the students write in their journals to record their feelings, expectations, trepidations, etc. Second, to help set the tone for the experience have the students read and reflect on a letter written to them from a local or world leader on why they should study the Holocaust. Third, on Bearing Witness the students will be seeing many memorials, monuments and plaques commemorating the history of the Holocaust in each city they visit. Students should consider: how do we memorialize the Holocaust? What is it we should remember and why? Why is there no future without memory?

Memorials exist because the memory of the Holocaust helps us reject indifference in the face of offenses against human life and dignity, and to collectively cry out “Never again!” Remembering what happened allows the virtues of solidarity and compassion for all who suffered to grow in the human heart. There is no future without memory, for it is good to remember what happened on those tragic days in the past to commit ourselves to a better future. It is a good idea for them to begin thinking about the meaning and purpose of memorials.

## DAY 2: MUNICH

ACIS welcomes you to Germany's most exciting city. Get oriented at the Marienplatz, do some shopping and climb the spires of medieval churches.

- **Student Presentations:** Those students assigned to create their travel guide pages on important historical/cultural sights in Munich will act as the group's tour guide and give short presentations at the place of their topic. No notes should be allowed for the short 3-5 minute presentation. Possible topics for presentations on this second day include the Glockenspiel and New Town Hall, the Marienplatz, Frauenkirche, etc.

## DAY 3: MUNICH

Morning mass at Michaelskirche followed by sightseeing including the Town Hall, the famous Glockenspiel, Odeonplatz and Residenz. Nearby the Residenz, you will also see copies of White Rose pamphlets that have been embedded in the pavement of Geschwister-Scholl- Platz outside the central hall of Ludwig-Maximilian University. This afternoon drive to the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial, a grim reminder of Nazi atrocities during WWII. Tonight enjoy dinner at the Hofbrauhaus.

- **Journal:** While on the tour of Munich in the morning students should have opportunities to journal on the themes they will encounter including the rise of Nazism, the Kristallnacht, resistance, etc. For example, having an opportunity to journal inside the lecture hall at Ludwig Maximilian University where Hans and Sophie Scholl were caught scattering anti-Nazi pamphlets in 1943 is a powerful way for your students to think carefully about the possibilities and limits of resistance during the Nazi era. Another good space for journaling on the same subject is inside St. Michael's Church where Fr. Rupert Mayer spoke out bravely against the Nazi movement.

Alternatively journaling inside the small Burgersaalkirche and museum to Fr. Mayer is an option as well.

- **Student Presentations:** Those students assigned to create their travel guide pages on important historical/cultural sights in Munich will act as the group's tour guide and give short presentations at the place of their topic. No notes should be allowed for the short 3-5 minute presentation.
- **Dachau:** The Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site lends itself well to a self-guided tour. Arrive to the museum right after lunch. Students can tour the museum first then walk the grounds of the memorial. There are several opportunities for student presentations at Dachau including the International Monument and Triangle Sculpture, the various chapels and religious memorials, the gas chamber/crematorium complex, etc. It is important students be given the time and opportunity to journal by themselves. Typically an hour is enough time for them to walk the grounds to find an appropriate place to sit and journal.

## DAY 4: PRAGUE

Journey to Regensburg, which received little damage from the bombing during World War II and the nearly intact medieval city centre is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Explore the quaint town and cathedral before you depart for Prague.

- **Student Presentations:** Possible topics for student presentations in Regensburg include the Old Stone Bridge, the Regensburg Cathedral, the Dani Caravan synagogue memorial, etc. Your arrival in the late afternoon in Prague will leave time for only a few presentations. Possible topics include the on the Jan Huss Memorial, Tyn Church, Ohel Jakob Synagogue and the Stolperstein Memorials.
- **Journal:** Prague and Regensburg are important places to study the history of Jewish life in Europe and to understand what was lost in the Holocaust. Whereas synagogues all over Europe were destroyed in the Holocaust many Jewish landmarks from Prague remain including the Old New, Jerusalem, the Spanish, and Pinkas Synagogues, as well as Ceremonial Hall and the old Jewish cemetery. Topics for journals on this day should relate to the history of Jewish life in Europe. Often a letter from a Holocaust survivor or Jewish leader for the students to read and reflect on is a good way to approach this history. Lastly, the statue of Nicholas Winton commemorating the Kindertransport at Wilson Station is a very important memorial.



## DAY 5: PRAGUE

This morning, take a guided tour of the immense Hradcany Castle complex with its Archbishop's Palace. In the afternoon, your Tour Manager accompanies you to the Prague Ghetto, which contains Europe's oldest Jewish cemetery, to visit the Old New Synagogue. The balance of the day is free to discover more of Prague at your own pace—promenade the 14th century Charles Bridge or keep your eyes open for local concerts.

- **Student Presentations:** Possible topics for student presentations include the Charles Bridge, St. Vitus Cathedral, the Old New and Pinkas Synagogues, Prague Astronomical Clock, 27 Tributary Crosses, etc.
- **Journal:** One of the best places for the students to journal is on the third floor of the Pinkas Synagogue. No longer a functioning synagogue this late medieval house of prayer and worship has been transformed into an extraordinary Holocaust memorial. Written on the interior walls of each floor are the names of over 70,000 victims of the Holocaust from Bohemia and Moravia. In addition on the third floor are original paintings created by children from the Theresienstadt ghetto, most of whom perished at Auschwitz. The solemnity of the memorial site is a good setting for the students to sit and record their feelings and reactions.
- **Parent Letters:** As the midway point of the week the evening of the 5th day provides an ideal opportunity to distribute parent letters to the students. Intended as a surprise the letters can be very impactful especially for those students who may be feeling a little homesick. Moreover for most parents Bearing Witness will be the longest and furthest they have been away from their child and the letters offer them an important opportunity to express their love and encouragement in a meaningful way. One of the best places for the students to receive and read these letters is during a late evening walk after dinner to the center of the Charles Bridge with beautiful Prague Castle lit up on one side and the picturesque architecture of the city of Prague on the other.
- **Group Discussion:** The evening of the fifth day is a good mid-week opportunity for a group discussion at the hotel or weather permitting outside in the city center of Prague during the evening. Students may discuss why they wanted to come on the trip, what has surprised them so far, what questions/themes have they been writing about in their journals, etc.

## DAY 6: KRAKOW

Leave Prague and stop in Olomouc, one of the oldest and most important cities in Bohemia. Continue to the vibrant city of Krakow.

- **Student Presentations:** Possible topics for student presentations in Olomouc include the Holy Trinity Column. Arriving late in the afternoon in Krakow there will be just enough time for a few presentations on such topics as St. Mary's Basilica, St. Adalbert Church, the Eros Bendato Sculpture, etc.
- **Group Meeting:** In the evening back at the hotel in a private conference room hold a meeting to go over the next day's agenda for the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Guide your students through the map of Auschwitz I and II and go over a brief history of the extermination camp. It is critical to impress upon the students the importance and unique nature of visiting a place like Auschwitz in order to ensure proper behavior and sensitivity. At this meeting it is a good idea to share another letter from a community leader who offers their own ideas on why students should study the history of the Holocaust.



### DAY 7: KRAKOW

Today is a full day excursion to Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, a grim reminder of Nazi terror. Sack lunch is included today. Return to Krakow for dinner and overnight.

- **Student Presentations:** It is best to leave all presentations at Auschwitz to the professional tour guides.
- **Journal:** Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau are important places for students to journal. Be sure to explain to your guide how much time you want your students to be able to journal. Giving the students 45 minutes at Auschwitz I and about 1.5 hours at Birkenau should be enough time for them to walk the grounds, think and find a good place to write.
- **Photograph exercise:** Ask the students to photograph whatever they find compelling or provocative during the day at Auschwitz I and II. Then later that evening back at the hotel's conference room invite each student to come forward and project onto the screen their most compelling photograph. Ask them to explain why they chose this photo, why it speaks to them, etc.
- **Group Discussion:** After dinner back at the hotel have a lengthy group discussion where the students share their pictures and journal writings from the day.

### DAY 8: KRAKOW

This morning you will visit Plaszow. Following there are visits to Wawel Castle Cathedral, this was once the residence of Polish monarchs during the 11th through the 17th centuries, and Oskar Schindler's Factory for a photo opportunity. In the afternoon explore the quarter known as Kazimierz, home to a thriving Jewish community from the 14th century until WWII, and the filming location for many scenes from Spielberg's Schindler's List. Enjoy a recap discussion (will be held in a hotel meeting room) of your trip after your final dinner in Poland.

### DAY 9: Departure for return flight to the United States

# MEET DOMINIC LYNSKEY

ACIS TOUR MANAGER & 7-TIME BEARING WITNESS GUIDE



**How did you come to be a part of Bearing Witness? How has it affected you personally?**

I joined Bearing Witness in its fourth year. I am generally a British & Irish-based tour manager who happened to spend the 1990s working in Central Europe, mainly the Czech Republic but also Romania and Poland. ACIS asked me if I would entertain the idea of partnering with Brendan, and I will admit I was reluctant at first to travel to the concentration camps, these places of atrocity. Talking with ACIS and seeing Brendan's passion helped me overcome my reservations. Bearing Witness has in many ways brought me full circle: it took me into the center of the concentration and death camps, continued my love of Central European literature, and reinvigorated my interests. It opened up old friendships and led to opportunities to create and lead ACIS trips in Central Europe with teachers whom I had worked with in the UK and Ireland.

**Describe your partnership with Brendan as you both try to help students digest this topic on location.**

Bearing Witness is essentially Brendan's trip, and understanding that is a key element to our working relationship. It's not your standard ACIS trip: it's one of a kind. Before the first trip, Brendan forwarded a letter outlining what Bearing Witness was. You could see what it meant to him, and I could see how important student presentations and spending decent amounts of time, especially at the camps, were to him. As a tour manager, you aim to assess an itinerary beforehand and look for potential issues and improvements, and that has been key to our working relationship from the beginning, as I think that I was able to pinpoint certain areas and improve them. I think another key element is taking pressure away from Brendan and allowing him to focus on the subject matter. Touring is very much about trust and thankfully we built that up on the first trip, and we continue to improve every year.

**Do you lead any specific activities or exercises on these trips that seem to aid in students' understanding?**

By its nature this is a trip that involves not as much tour manager input from an informational standpoint, as Brendan is the one providing the history, but it is one that involves a lot from a motivational standpoint. Keeping a group moving and happy when dealing with such testing subject matter is a challenge. The beauty of this trip is



that it is not all doom and gloom; we also have time to take in other cultural aspects and that is where the tour manager comes in. In some respects, I think I end up being the funny man to Brendan's straight man. We aim to complement each other. Through the use of music, props etc., I aim to bring light relief to those down moments and the travel in between, to just take the students away from the darkness for a moment and open up other aspects of the trip. It is about finding a balance, which is like any trip, but more so on this one as the subject matter is so heavy.

### **What do you hope students come away with?**

I hope that they take away the fact that the Holocaust is not just an individual historical occurrence but a living and breathing event that reverberates to this day. You hope —and this is a key part of Bearing Witness — that students not only come away with an understanding of antisemitism throughout the centuries, but that their experiences and reflections during the week enable them to always keep an open and rational mind with regards to all events. To not just accept so-called fact, but to always study and question it.



# GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST

- › **Define the term “Holocaust”:** The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. 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.
- › **Do not teach or imply that the Holocaust was inevitable:** Just because a historical event took place, and it is documented in textbooks and on film, does not mean that it had to happen. This seemingly obvious concept is often overlooked by students and teachers alike. The Holocaust took place because individuals, groups, and nations made decisions to act or not to act. Focusing on those decisions leads to insights into history and human nature and can help your students to become better critical thinkers.
- › **Avoid simple answers to complex problems:** The history of the Holocaust raises difficult questions about human behavior and the context within which individual decisions are made. Be wary of simplification. Seek instead to convey the nuances of this history. Allow students to think about the many factors and events that contributed to the Holocaust and that often made decision making difficult and uncertain.
- › **Strive for precision of language:** Any study of the Holocaust touches upon nuances of human behavior. Because of the complexity of the history, there is a temptation to generalize and, thus, to distort the facts (e.g., “all concentration camps were killing centers” or “all Germans were collaborators”). Avoid this by helping your students clarify the information presented and encourage them to distinguish, for example, the differences between prejudice and discrimination, collaborators and bystanders, armed and spiritual resistance, direct and assumed orders, concentration camps and killing centers, and guilt and responsibility.

Words that describe human behavior often have multiple meanings. Resistance, for example, usually refers to a physical act of armed revolt. During the Holocaust, it also encompassed partisan activity; the smuggling of messages, food, and weapons; sabotage; and actual military engagement.

Resistance may also be thought of as willful disobedience, such as continuing to practice religious and cultural traditions in defiance of the rules or creating fine art, music, and poetry inside ghettos and concentration camps. For many, simply maintaining the will to live in the face of abject brutality was an act of spiritual resistance.

Try to avoid stereotypical descriptions. Though all Jews were targeted for destruction by the Nazis, the experiences of all Jews were not the same. Remind your students that, although members of a group may share common experiences and beliefs, generalizations about them without benefit of modifying or qualifying terms (e.g.,

“sometimes,” “usually,” “in many cases but not all”) tend to stereotype group behavior and distort historical reality. Thus, all Germans cannot be characterized as Nazis, nor should any nationality be reduced to a singular or one-dimensional description.

- › **Strive for balance in establishing whose perspective informs your study of the Holocaust:** Most students express empathy for victims of mass murder. However, it is not uncommon for students to assume that the victims may have done something to justify the actions against them and for students to thus place inappropriate blame on the victims themselves. One helpful technique for engaging students in a discussion of the Holocaust is to think of the participants as belonging to one of four categories: victims, perpetrators, rescuers, or bystanders. Examine the actions, motives, and decisions of each group. Portray all individuals, including victims and perpetrators, as human beings who are capable of moral judgment and independent decision making.

As with any topic, students should make careful distinctions about sources of information. Students should be encouraged to consider why a particular text was written, who wrote it, who the intended audience was, whether any biases were inherent in the information, whether any gaps occurred in discussion, whether omissions in certain passages were inadvertent or not, and how the information has been used to interpret various events. Because scholars often base their research on different bodies of information, varying interpretations of history can emerge.

Consequently, all interpretations are subject to analytical evaluation. Strongly encourage your students to investigate carefully the origin and authorship of all material, particularly anything found on the Internet.



- › **Avoid comparisons of pain:** A study of the Holocaust should always highlight the different policies carried out by the Nazi regime toward various groups of people; however, these distinctions should not be presented as a basis for comparison of the level of suffering between those groups during the Holocaust. One cannot presume that



the horror of an individual, family, or community destroyed by the Nazis was any greater than that experienced by victims of other genocides. Avoid generalizations that suggest exclusivity such as “The victims of the Holocaust suffered the most cruelty ever faced by a people in the history of humanity.”

- › **Do not romanticize history:** People who risked their lives to rescue victims of Nazi oppression provide useful, important, and compelling role models for students. But given that only a small fraction of non-Jews under Nazi occupation helped rescue Jews, an overemphasis on heroic actions in a unit on the Holocaust can result in an inaccurate and unbalanced account of the history. Similarly, in exposing students to the worst aspects of human nature as revealed in the history of the Holocaust, you run the risk of fostering cynicism in your students. Accuracy of fact, together with a balanced perspective on the history, must be a priority.
- › **Contextualize the history:** Events of the Holocaust, and particularly how individuals and organizations behaved at that time, should be placed in historical context. The Holocaust must be studied in the context of European history as a whole to give students a perspective on the precedents and circumstances that may have contributed to it.

Similarly, the Holocaust should be studied within its contemporaneous context so students can begin to comprehend the circumstances that encouraged or discouraged particular actions or events. For example, when thinking about resistance, consider when and where an act took place; the immediate consequences of one’s actions to self and family; the degree of control the Nazis had on a country or local population; the cultural attitudes of particular native populations toward different victim groups historically; and the availability and risk of potential hiding places.

Encourage your students not to categorize groups of people only on the basis of their experiences during the Holocaust; contextualization is critical so that victims are not perceived only as victims. By exposing students to some of the cultural contributions and achievements of 2,000 years of European Jewish life, for example, you help them to balance their perception of Jews as victims and to appreciate more fully the traumatic disruption in Jewish history caused by the Holocaust.

- › **Translate statistics into people:** In any study of the Holocaust, the sheer number of victims challenges easy comprehension. Show that individual people—grandparents, parents, and children—are behind the statistics and emphasize the diversity of personal experiences within the larger historical narrative. Precisely because they portray people in the fullness of their lives and not just as victims, first-person accounts and memoir literature add individual voices to a collective experience and help students make meaning out of the statistics.
- › **Make responsible methodological choices:** One of the primary concerns of educators teaching the history of the Holocaust is how to present horrific, historical images in a sensitive and appropriate manner. Graphic material should be used judiciously and only to the extent necessary to achieve the lesson objective. Try to select images and texts that do not exploit the students’ emotional vulnerability or that might be construed as disrespectful to the victims themselves. Do not skip any of the suggested topics because the visual images are too graphic; instead, use other approaches to address the material.

In studying complex human behavior, many teachers rely upon simulation exercises meant to help students “experience” unfamiliar situations. Even when great care is taken to prepare a class for such an activity, simulating experiences from the Holocaust remains pedagogically unsound. The activity may engage students, but they often forget the purpose of the lesson and, even worse, they are left with the impression that they now know what it was like to suffer or even to participate during the Holocaust. It is best to draw upon numerous primary sources, provide survivor testimony, and refrain from simulation games that lead to a trivialization of the subject matter.

Furthermore, word scrambles, crossword puzzles, counting objects, model building, and other gimmicky exercises tend not to encourage critical analysis but lead instead to low-level types of thinking and, in the case of Holocaust curricula, trivialization of the history. If the effects of a particular activity, even when popular with you and your students, run counter to the rationale for studying the history, then that activity should not be used.





# EXTENSION ACTIVITY: THE DAFFODIL PROJECT

Am Yisrael Chai is a nonprofit Holocaust education and awareness organization located in Atlanta, GA. In 2010 Am Yisrael Chai developed The Daffodil Project that aspires to build a living Holocaust memorial by planting 1.5 million daffodils around the world in memory of the 1.5 million children who perished in the Holocaust and in support of children suffering in humanitarian crises today.

Daffodil memorial gardens have been planted at synagogues, churches, schools, city parks, and other places where flowers are welcome all over the world. To date The Daffodil Project has planted nearly 500,000 daffodils.



As explained by Dr. Andrea Videlefsky, Director of Am Yisrael Chai, “The shape and color of daffodils represent the yellow stars Jews were forced to wear during the Holocaust. Yellow is the color of remembrance and hope for the future. They are resilient and return with a burst of color each spring, signifying hope, renewal and beauty. The daffodils also represent those who survived the Holocaust and went on to build new lives after this dark and difficult period.”

It is said the greatest journey starts in the heart. The Bearing Witness program lends itself well to The Daffodil Project. Students, parents, friends and family members can join the global initiative and participate in The Daffodil Project by planting daffodils in their community. The event is a wonderful opportunity to invite Holocaust survivors and their families who can offer remarks or even share their personal story for the students and participants.

For more information, visit [www.daffodilproject.net](http://www.daffodilproject.net)





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