

Holocaust Education in Germany

World War II and Hitler's dictatorship have in fact figured prominently in the curriculum of (West) German schools since the early 1950s and in the schools of united Germany since 1990. From the 1960s onward, special emphasis has been placed upon conveying the horrors of the Holocaust. Outside the school curriculum, World War II, the Holocaust and Jewish issues are often featured in print media, in television, and in the world of arts.

Education in Germany is the responsibility of the German states. Education policy is coordinated on a national level by a standing conference of state ministers of education and cultural affairs. It is this body that has issued specific guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust. The treatment of the Nazi period in all its aspects is part of the compulsory curriculum in all German schools and at all levels of education. The Holocaust is treated as the most important aspect of the period of Nazi rule.

The Holocaust is treated in various school subjects in different ways:

- In history classes, the Nazi period is dealt with in the context of 20th century German or world history.
- In civics and current affairs classes the lessons of the Holocaust are related to teaching about German political institutions and about the values that govern political life in a democratic society. Tolerance and the role of law are a primary focus of these lessons.
- In religion and ethics classes, the Holocaust is discussed with reference to the guilt and responsibility of those Germans who did not risk their lives to fight National Socialism or to protect Jews.
- Much postwar German literature is concerned with coming to terms with the Nazi era and the Holocaust.
- A visit to a Holocaust memorial or a Holocaust museum at the site of a former concentration camp is a standard feature of German school excursions.

The objective of teaching about the Holocaust is not limited to educating students about historical facts. Instead, the primary political and educational objective for confronting young Germans with their country's darkest past and their ancestors' guilt is, above all, to make them understand the consequences of Hitler's dictatorship, the uniqueness of the Holocaust, and to make them appreciate the values and institutions that protect freedom and democracy.

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For examples of Holocaust education in Germany, visit www.holocaust-education.de