



Staying Age-Appropriate

Overview

When we are teaching young children about the Holocaust, we must be very careful how we go about it. We are not trying to traumatize our students. We are trying to help them learn. Here are some tips and tricks to keeping things age-appropriate.

Cardinal Rules for All Ages

DO	DO NOT
Help your students understand Tell <u>true</u> , <u>age-appropriate</u> stories that help your students understand what happened.	Rather than making them cry Do not attempt to make your students <u>cry</u> by telling the <u>most horrific</u> stories, or feeling the need to tell them the <u>whole</u> story at every age.
Teach through empathy Ask your students to try to empathize – to understand how the <u>people</u> felt.	Not through role-play Do not try to make your students contemplate how <u>they</u> would have felt in those situations.
Allow your students to react naturally Help your students <u>express</u> the emotions this brings up, whatever those may be.	Not to be solemn and quiet (or “strong”) Do not expect your students to <u>hide</u> their emotions, or to “be strong” or “able to handle it.”
Allow your students to ask questions Even if those questions do not seem to be age-appropriate. Answer them simply and straightforwardly, and move on.	Rather than avoiding answering Do not suggest that some answers are too scary for them, as this only makes those questions more interesting.

Safety Nets

Here are some safety nets we maintain for our younger students:

- ✧ **Tell stories of survivors, starting with the protagonist as a grown up wanting to tell us about something that happened when they were young.** This way our students never worry about whether the protagonist in the story will get through the difficulties.
- ✧ **Emphasize that this happened a long time ago in a faraway place.** By adding distance, we reduce the likelihood that the students will become fearful something similar could happen to them. *(Note that we may want middle and high schoolers to consider this issue but it is too traumatic for elementary schoolers.)*



- ✧ **Emphasize that the children had loving families.** For the youngest students (K-3), those families remain intact throughout the story. This safety net recognizes that for children, *safety is not in a place but with people, especially family.*

Tips

Here are some tips for the best outcomes.

- ✧ It often takes students some time to process the material. They may have questions that come up later, or have spoken to an older sibling or parent, who brought up something else. Here are two hints for helping them with that processing:
 - **Have the regular classroom teacher teach these lessons.** This way, students feel they have a resource to go back to when they have questions at a later time.
 - **Make sure you have at least one class after the final lesson of the unit, preferably the following week.** Do not teach your final lesson on the final day of classes. Be sure that you have a class after they have completed the unit so they can come back and ask questions.
- ✧ The Holocaust is heavy material that takes a lot of focus. Know your students' limits. Here are some hints for taking this into account:
 - **Expect these lessons to take multiple classes.**
 - **In each class, stay within your students' natural attention span.** Use no more than one block of their attention on this material.
 - **Do not devote the entire class to the Holocaust.** Use one block of attention, and then move on to something else, preferably something lighter.

Expectations

Every class is different and teachers should determine what is age-appropriate based on their knowledge of the maturity of their class. Nonetheless, here is an idea of what you can expect to be appropriate at each level. Try to avoid mentioning ideas that are only age-appropriate at older ages.

Grade	Age-appropriate material
All Ages	Life before the war; Life after the war
K-2	Moving to the ghettos; Hiding; Intact families (although one parent may be lost)
3-5	Living in the ghetto; Living in hiding; Kindertransport; Broken families
6-8	The difficulty of life in the ghetto; Deportation; Labor Camps
9-12	Mass murder, including gas chambers and killing pits
College/Adult	Medical experiments (e.g. Mengele)