

From Museum to Classroom: Using Artifacts to Enrich Learning

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Lesson plan

This lesson, designed for high school juniors and seniors learning Jewish or world history, will take 2--3 days and includes a visit to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum at 100 Raoul Wallenberg Pl. SW, Washington, D.C. 20024 (or a Holocaust museum closer to you). All students should bring paper and pencil (they cannot use tablets or laptops in the museum) to the museum so they can note useful information.

Learning Goal: The learner will know how to reflect on historical artifacts to increase appreciation of and compassion for the human beings who endured the tragedy of the Holocaust.

Learning activities: Day 1 (trip day): In the museum, each student should find one artifact that interests them particularly and should respond to those of the following questions that are applicable to their artifact.

1. What is the artifact? Describe (color, shape, size, purpose, condition, etc.) and/or sketch it.
2. What about it particularly interested you?
3. Who was the person connected to that artifact?
4. What was his/her profession?
5. In what city/country did that person live?
6. Did he/she survive?
7. What emotions did you feel when seeing and reading about this artifact? Why do you think this artifact evoked these feelings in you?

On the way home or in the evening, students can edit their notes to prepare to submit them to you. Take note of the kinds of artifacts they chose to prepare for the next day's class. You will make category cards based on your students' choices (examples: instruments, identification papers, letters, tools, religious articles, etc.) and distribute the cards in the next class.

Day 2 (in class): Distribute the category cards; instruct students to form groups based on their category and share what they learned about their artifact and why that learning is important when one is studying this subject. This should lead to some very productive discussion (half-period). For the second half of the period, each group should choose a representative to give a 3-4 minute overview of the highlights of the discussions. All should address the "big idea": Of what use are artifacts in learning more about the people of the Holocaust?

Day 3: Collect everyone's information and review, and, if you wish to extend this project to a 3rd day, identify which aspects you want the students to examine further. Such options might include an examination of the broader aspects of work with artifacts, such as how each one in particular helped students to learn more about a fact or an event of the Holocaust; how each helped to humanize the statistics and make the event more real and personal; how artifacts can introduce students to the people of the Holocaust even when they are no longer with us; and how an artifact in their own life might best represent them and their accomplishments, beliefs, values, and/or religious practice. In what ways did this artifact examination make them want to learn more about the person who owned it and/or about the Holocaust in general?