

Recommendations for Study Tours to Holocaust-Related Sites

These recommendations, first published in 2001 as guidelines, have been recently expanded to address the substantial increase in youth study tours at Holocaust-related sites, authentic and non-authentic ones, over the past few years. An authentic site is a place where a historical event occurred during the Holocaust. Many of these sites have been transformed into memorial and/or educational sites and/or museums.

Various organizations and schools in a growing number of countries coordinate visits to Holocaust-related sites in many countries across Europe, in Israel, in the United States, and in other countries.

Throughout the past decade, Holocaust Memorial Days have been legislated in more than thirty countries around the world, and in November 2005, the United Nations passed a resolution to institute an annual International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust on January 27. In light of this situation, an increased number of visits to authentic and non-authentic sites are organized in conjunction with Holocaust remembrance days.

Study trips to Holocaust-related sites – both to the authentic places and to the memorial sites and museums - require serious preparation, active participation, and follow-up activities. These activities should have a clear emphasis on learning the history of the Holocaust, but can be enriched by inter-disciplinary approaches. Educators should consider how study trips are integrated in the broader scheme of classroom work – a visit to these places cannot stand alone.

A comprehensive study of the Holocaust should include the perspectives of the victims, perpetrators, collaborators, bystanders and rescuers. However, during visits to former concentration camps or extermination centers, the experience of the victims should be the primary focus. Studying the role and actions of those who carried out the murder should rather be part of the preparation of the visit or its follow-up, and teachers should select appropriate learning activities so that students do not identify with the perpetrators.

Staff of authentic and non-authentic sites should recognize their responsibility to provide educators with assistance, information, and materials for preparation and follow-up lessons in school, and educators should allocate sufficient time for these activities in their classrooms.

The most comprehensive resource compiled to date on Holocaust-related sites, including an interactive map of all Holocaust memorials, monuments, memorial sites, institutions and museums in commemoration to Nazi victims, may be found at: www.memorial-museums.net/

Summary:

Preparing Study Tours to Holocaust-Related Sites

- A visit to an authentic or to a non-authentic site should not be considered in and of itself to be sufficient in a study of the Holocaust. The educator must be clear about the aims of a visit to an authentic or non-authentic site. How will it complement, extend, and develop classroom work?
- It is essential that the visit is carefully planned and that the educator contacts the site for advice when preparing the visit.
- Ideally, educators will make a preliminary visit and/or attend teacher-training seminars related to bringing students on a study trip to the site.
- The preparation must make clear that an authentic site is a memorial with its own history, and that a visit to that site can involve learning not only about the past but also how that past has been remembered and commemorated.

Touring the Sites

- Visits to authentic and non-authentic sites create special learning experiences and opportunities different from those in the classroom. A visit can also raise the “status” of a subject in the eyes of students who see that they have been taken out of school and out of other subjects in order to make the visit.
- Authentic sites provide a unique atmosphere, which can create a special desire to learn and which evokes strong emotions. It is the duty of the educator to be aware that they will be exposing their students to these strong emotions and to take this into account when structuring the visit.
- Authentic sites provide opportunities for in-depth study of particular places and moments in time.
- The opportunity to study original artifacts can stimulate interest, motivation, and learning and can provide a direct and tangible link with people in the past that is difficult to replicate in the classroom.
- A visit to an authentic site should focus on the history of that site. Students should actively use the site as historical evidence to explore themes and issues that were discussed during the pre-visit work. The visit should not be seen as only an opportunity to answer these historical questions, but as a stimulus for new historical, moral, and ethical questions.

- **The role of the teacher during visits to authentic and non-authentic sites is paramount, even though s/he may not guide his/her students on the premises.**
- **Most students are unused to learning from authentic and non-authentic sites and many will not have the learning skills necessary for these environments. Therefore, the non-authentic site and the authentic site should facilitate students' learning during the visit by helping students to interpret the displays.**
- **The educator should encourage discussion and reflection at the site as an integral part of the visit, providing space and time to make this possible.**

Following Up After the Study Tours

- **The follow-up work should respond to the questions raised by the students as a result of the study trip and help them to place what they have learned during the visit into a broader context.**

Recommendations for Study Tours to Holocaust-Related Sites

A visit to an authentic or to a non-authentic site should not be considered in and of itself to be sufficient in a study of the Holocaust. The educator must be clear about the aims of a visit to an authentic and non-authentic site. How will it complement, extend, and develop classroom work?

Learning about the Holocaust, which is a complex and difficult subject, is an educational process. Although study trips can greatly enhance the students' educational experience, visiting Holocaust memorials and museums cannot replace full history lessons. For pedagogical suggestions developed by the International Task Force on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research on what and how to teach about the Holocaust, [click here](#).

It is essential that the visit is carefully planned and that the educator contacts the site for advice when preparing the visit.

Printed or web-based materials, such as pamphlets, booklets and brochures, may be obtained from the site beforehand and distributed to the students prior to their visit. This material is often gratis or available for purchase.

For instance, according to the education department at [Sachsenhausen](#):
 “Shortly before a visit to the memorial, it is useful to discuss the visit one more time with the pupils. It is of vital importance that the pupils understand that the layout of the camp has been changed since National Socialist times. Photos can help to give the pupils an idea of the site. It is suggested that the pupils' questions about the camp be collected prior to the visit.”

The trips of students who visit authentic sites may be organized within a variety of educational frameworks from formal (schools and delegations of student unions) and informal (church groups and youth movements) sectors. Clearly, the goals of these visits may differ depending on the rationale and focus of the trip as conceived and shaped by each of the coordinators. In recent years, travel companies have been organizing school visits to authentic sites. In light of this situation, it is



A youth group visiting the Lern- und Gedenkort Schloss Hartheim, Austria, July 2003

recommended that teachers establish direct contact with the professional staff of the sites to plan their visit even though a tour operator may coordinate all of the logistical arrangements.

Parental involvement in the preparation of visits to authentic sites often provides a sense of a larger learning community that is supportive before, during and after the study trip.

Ideally, educators will make a preliminary visit and/or attend teacher-training seminars related to bringing students on a study trip to the site.

A number of sites organize teacher-training seminars and workshops in order to enrich educators who are interested in gaining a deeper understanding about the Holocaust in general and about what occurred at the specific memorial site in particular.

For instance, at the [Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest](#), “In addition to informing students about the Holocaust, our center organizes teacher-training programs as well. During the workshops we discuss contemporary issues and debated questions related to Holocaust research and their significance in socio-psychology, history and literature. The teacher’s film club screens feature films and documentaries that can be used in classroom activities. Discussions following the screenings are moderated by experts.”

For more information about professional development seminars offered at many sites, see a list of website links provided at the end of this document.

Many Holocaust memorials are comprised of a museum exhibition as well as a learning center and/or educational department.

For instance, the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum \(USHMM\)](#) includes various exhibits and an education division. “Educators who bring students to the Permanent Exhibition [of the USHMM] play a vital role in helping the Museum fulfill its educational and outreach goals. Each year, hundreds of thousands of students come to Washington DC to visit the Museum and learn about the history of the Holocaust.

The Permanent Exhibition of the USHMM can serve multiple educational purposes. Most educators use the exhibition as an introduction to a unit of study, to supplement classroom curriculum, or as the culmination of a unit of study on the Holocaust. Some educators rely on a visit to the exhibition as the primary opportunity for exposing students to the history of the Holocaust. The scope of the Permanent Exhibition provides educators of various disciplines – history, literature, social studies, science, and art – ways to effectively integrate a Museum visit into their curricula.”

The preparation must make clear that an authentic site is a memorial with its own history, and that a visit to that site can involve learning not only about the past but also how that past has been remembered and commemorated.

Holocaust-related memorial sites, often including graveyards, are in effect solemn places. Educators should exercise their best judgment about the number of Holocaust-related sites visited by their students during their study trips. It is important to ensure that sufficient time will be provided to tour each site, despite logistics and other scheduling issues.



September 1, 2005, Lighting Candles at the Wall of Death at Auschwitz I-Stammlager. Polish students, participants of the conference "The First Day of the WWII" organized by the International Center of Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust (ICEAH). Courtesy, ICEAH, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Poland

Authentic sites also incorporate educational centers that focus on promoting awareness with hope for the future. The educational objective of many education centers, located on both authentic and non-authentic sites, is often three-fold:

- Education: To advance and disseminate knowledge about this unprecedented tragedy.
- Remembrance: To preserve the memory of those who suffered.
- Conscience: To encourage visitors to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own personal responsibilities.

Some educators commonly raise the question, “Why should we take our students to visit a place that has been destroyed where there is such little left to see?” This question may serve as a trigger for classroom discussion prior to the visit, enabling educators and students to explore a number of dimensions related to visiting such sites.

Touring the Sites

Visits to authentic and non-authentic sites create special learning experiences and opportunities different from those in the classroom. A visit can also raise the “status” of a subject in the eyes of students who see that they have been taken out of school and out of other subjects in order to make the visit.

During their Holocaust-related visits to authentic and non-authentic sites, students often gain insights about the perpetrators, collaborators, victims, bystanders and rescuers. For instance, at [Majdanek](#) in Poland, students may raise questions about the bystanders who lived in the environs of the camp. The [House of the Wannsee Conference](#), in Germany, organizes seminars on the Holocaust for a wide variety of groups, among them members of the civil service studying the participation of the Nazi bureaucracy in planning and implementing the Holocaust.

In the course of the past few years, seminars for youth at many German Holocaust-related memorial sites, such as [Ravensbrueck](#), [Sachsenhausen](#), [Buchenwald](#) and [Bergen Belsen](#), have been organized. These courses provide the opportunity of spending several days at the memorials, delving deeper into the history of the sites.



*Seminar for Youth at
Buchenwald, Germany*



*House of the Wannsee Conference;
Students Investigating the Permanent
Exhibition*

These seminars place an emphasis on:

- History of buildings, structural foundations, overgrown sites, found objects and documents
- Historical context of the camp
- Complex interrelationships between the camp and its surrounding inhabitants during the Nazi period
- History of the site since World War II and of the memorial
- Examination of and reflection upon the convictions, behavior and feelings of visitors
- Encounters with others and the ensuing confrontation with one's own beliefs, behaviors, fears and hopes

The work carried out during these study seminars is action- and process-oriented. In addition to the exploration of the site, discussion, and work with documents and literature, special importance is attached to the active processing of experiences by means of maintenance and excavation work, exhibitions, art, interviews, photography, videos, etc. The emotional aspects are no less important than the intellectual ones, and an atmosphere of mutual trust enables participants to confront and examine issues connected with these places.

Authentic sites provide a unique atmosphere, which can create a special desire to learn and which evokes strong emotions. It is the duty of the educator to be aware that they will be exposing their students to these strong emotions and to take this into account when structuring the visit.

Visiting an authentic site can be an educationally meaningful and emotionally charged experience for visitors of all ages. Students ultimately cannot always prepare themselves for what they will feel and see there. These visits, which in effect make textbooks come alive, usually have more impact than studying the subject in the classroom. Students often believe that their teachers have expectations about their behavior at the site. However, teachers need to recognize that the lack of crying and/or laughter should not deter them from taking groups in the future. It is important for both students and teachers to realize that there is not one way to react when visiting an authentic Holocaust-related site.

For some students, keeping a journal about their visit to an authentic site may be useful. Students may wish to record their insights, questions and memories graphically and spontaneously in a private notebook. At a later date, students may wish to reflect on their remarks and queries. Many students have found that keeping journals when studying about the Holocaust or visiting Holocaust-related memorial sites encourage their own self-understanding.

Authentic sites provide opportunities for in-depth study of particular places and moments in time.

Each authentic site has its own historical context, and therefore visiting one place is not the same as visiting another one. It is important to remember that although

students may see traces and remnants at many authentic sites, it is virtually impossible to recreate what happened at this authentic site during the Holocaust period. The narrative of each individual memorial should be highlighted to the students, especially when students may be visiting more than one site during the same week.

When visiting a non-authentic site, students are in effect often twice removed since they are not standing at the actual place where the events took place. In museums that have not been built on authentic sites, students don't actually confront the subject matter until they enter the exhibits.

For example, at [Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority](#) located on the Mountain of Remembrance in Jerusalem, the educational campus was intentionally built away from the hustle and bustle of main boulevards, as though signaling to those who enter its gates, that they are entering a place that beckons them to remember.

The opportunity to study original artifacts can stimulate interest, motivation, and learning and can provide a direct and tangible link with people in the past that is difficult to replicate in the classroom.

Authentic memorial sites, such as extermination camps built by Nazi Germany, are very powerful in the sense that they force students to face evil in its most extreme form. However, it is important to remember that before human beings entered these Holocaust-related camps as prisoners, they had relatively normal lives. It is highly recommended that trip organizers not only allow students to see how people were murdered on an industrial scale due to pseudo-scientific racial ideology, but rather show the rich cultural and spiritual tapestry of Jewish life before the Holocaust. As students encounter the remains of prewar Jewish life and Jewish customs, they gather more information about the background of the victims whose names and identities were erased by the perpetrators and their collaborators.



*Father Emile Shoufani and His Colleagues
Visiting Yad Vashem in February 2003.
Courtesy, Yad Vashem, Israel*

The educator has a responsibility to the students and should be sure that a visit to an authentic site or museum is appropriate for the age of their students. It is essential that the educator consult with the staff of the authentic site or museum about whether there is a suggested minimum age.

A visit to an authentic site should focus on the history of that site. Students should actively use the site as historical evidence to explore themes and issues that were discussed during the pre-visit work. The visit should not be seen as only an opportunity to answer these historical questions, but as a stimulus for new historical, moral, and ethical questions.

The Holocaust took place across the European continent. When visiting a specific authentic site, it is often difficult to relate to its broader context within the history of the Third Reich in general and the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” in particular. In light of this situation, it is suggested whenever possible to schedule visits to authentic sites following a course of study. For pedagogical suggestions developed by the International Task Force on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research on what and how to teach about the Holocaust, [click here](#).

The role of the teacher during visits to authentic and non-authentic sites is paramount, even though s/he may not guide his/her students on the premises.

Communicating with the guide ahead of time is advisable whenever possible. Teachers should accompany their classes to create a stable learning environment in order to ensure that their students behave in an appropriate manner during their visit.



Students Visiting Exhibits at Bergen Belsen, Germany

For instance, according to the visitor code of the [Pamatnik-Terezin](#) memorial, “Throughout their time at sites administered by the Terezín Memorial visitors are required to act in a civil and courteous manner, and with respect towards the historical, social and cultural importance of the Terezín Memorial itself, as well as with the greatest possible consideration both towards the material substance of these monuments and towards other visitors.”

Most students are unused to learning from authentic and non-authentic sites and many will not have the learning skills necessary for these environments. Therefore, the non-authentic site and the authentic site should facilitate students’ learning during the visit by helping students to interpret the displays.

Prior to the visits, professional educational staff should take into account students’ ages, different learning needs, and varying degrees of knowledge. Educational activities might include the provision of orientation and/or debriefing sessions, guided tours, worksheets, audio guides, etc.

During visits to Holocaust-related sites, educators should select appropriate learning activities and avoid using simulations that encourage students to identify with perpetrators or victims. Although empathetic activities can be very effective techniques for interesting young people in history by highlighting human experience and responses to events in the past, great care needs to be taken in selecting such activities, especially at authentic sites.

For example, the educational staff of the [Imperial War Museum](#) has developed audio tours for student groups who visit the Holocaust Exhibition there. According to their educational approach, “How do you interest a 14-year-old in a historical exhibition when some of the most important objects are as ordinary as toothbrushes, pots and pans, and old shoes? How do you present young people with a story of destruction and mass murder without encouraging a morbid interest in death or dehumanizing the victims?”

The solution in the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum has been to use audio guides to focus young people’s attention on key artifacts, and to allow these objects and the personal stories behind them to speak for themselves.

Once the visitor understands that these everyday items were recovered from the Nazi death camps of occupied Poland – brought there by victims deceived that they were being resettled and would soon begin a new life – their significance as material evidence of genocide becomes apparent.”

Staff members of Holocaust-related authentic and non-authentic sites are usually well-trained professionals who not only have acquired a vast amount of knowledge, but also have learned how to guide visitors, including school groups. Youth peer education is an approach whereby motivated youngsters actively attempt to reach their peers (often those similar to them in age and background) by helping them gain knowledge and skills to be responsible citizens. Some educators may wish to implement peer education modules at authentic and non-authentic sites, however, most high school students cannot adequately learn how to become professional guides without higher education as well as proper, extensive training. In light of this situation, it is recommended to work with the educational staff at the sites that have gained extensive experience working with pupils.



*Students Visiting
Beth Shalom, UK*

The educator should encourage discussion and reflection at the site as an integral part of the visit, providing space and time to make this possible.

Memory is a conversation. Educators are the brokers in this conversation, steering the educational process about what students learn at authentic and non-authentic sites.

For example, [Mauthausen](#), in Austria, “...was a place where the destinies of citizens of numerous European and non-European states met. Visiting sites enables visitors to learn facts, encourage awareness and awaken their responsibility as moral citizens. Combined memories that are intertwined require careful attention as we move into the future.”

Many educators and their students may wish to conduct Holocaust remembrance ceremonies at authentic and non-authentic sites. It is recommended that students

actively prepare ahead of time stories about their own family members, or readings about other victims to be incorporated into ceremonies. Customs and rituals of remembrance, such as playing musical selections, conducting prayers, lighting candles, reciting poems and the names of victims are very common at sites. Although forms of Holocaust remembrance and education are usually quite different in character, commemoration ceremonies at sites are an important component of the educational process.

Following Up After the Study Tours

The follow-up work should respond to the questions raised by the students as a result of the study trip and help them to place what they have learned during the visit into a broader context.

For example, according to the educational staff at [Auschwitz-Birkenau](#), “The further we get from the times of the Second World War, the greater the significance of education at memorial sites. This is especially important for the younger generation, whose knowledge and sensitivity are taking shape. For the succeeding generations born after the war, the history of half a century ago is so distant that younger people cannot identify with it the way their parents or grandparents did. Auschwitz is a special symbol for various ethnic and religious groups; as at all memorial sites, education here makes an important contribution to contemporary society. Visits to the site and accompanying educational efforts have great potential for shaping the attitudes of young people. They can teach tolerance and show how it is possible to stand up to and say no to xenophobia, prejudice, stereotypes, and racial discrimination. Humanity will never be free of such negative phenomena, and such attitudes can lead, if not resisted in time, to unimaginable barbarity - even in the center of the civilized world.

Continual close cooperation between educators at the Museum and teachers in the schools is a prerequisite for the universal meaning and moral import of visits by young people to have the fullest possible impact. At the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum Educational Center, teachers can obtain factual information, carefully prepared sets of teaching aids including historical materials, and plans for lesson cycles that prepare young people for visits to the Museum and follow up on such visits.”

For an outline about what to teach about the Holocaust, [click here](#).

For more information about why to teach about the Holocaust, [click here](#).

For pedagogical guidelines on how to teach about the Holocaust, [click here](#).

It is suggested that educators and their students make themselves familiar with the websites of authentic and non-authentic sites prior to their visits. The most comprehensive resource compiled to date on Holocaust-related authentic and non-authentic sites, including an interactive map of all Holocaust memorials, monuments, memorial sites, institutions and museums in commemoration to Nazi victims, may be found at: www.memorial-museums.net/

In addition, the following list of links, though not exhaustive, may also be useful in planning specific Holocaust-related study trips in ITF member states and other countries.



March of the Living in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland, 2005

Argentina

www.fmh.org.ar

Austria

www.mauthausen-memorial.at

www.schloss-hartheim.at

Belgium

www.cicb.be

Canada

www.mhmc.ca

Croatia

www.jusp-jasenovac.hr

Czech Republic

www.pamatnik-terezin.cz

France

www.memorial-cdjc.org

Germany

www.gedenkstaettenforum.de

www.stiftung-bg.de/gums/en/index.htm

www.topographie.de

www.ghwk.de

www.buchenwald.de

www.ravensbrueck.de

www.bergen-belsen.de

www.kz-gedenkstaette-dachau.de

Hungary

www.hdke.hu

Israel

www.yadvashem.org

www.gfh.org.il

www.massuah.org

Italy

<http://www.windcloak.it/cultura/risiera.htm>

Lithuania

www.jmuseum.lt

Mexico

www.memoriaytolerancia.com

The Netherlands

www.annefrank.org

www.westerbork.nl

www.nmkampvught.nl

www.hollandscheschouwborg.nl

Norway

www.hlsenteret.no

Poland

www.auschwitz.org.pl

www.belzec.org.pl

www.majdanek.pl/

South Africa

www.ctholocaust.co.za

United Kingdom

www.iwm.org.uk

www.het.org.uk

www.bethshalom.com

United States of America

www.ushmm.org

www.mjhnyc.org

www.wiesenthal.com

www.hmh.org

www.flholocaustmuseum.org