

I teach freshman English composition and English education courses at BYU-Idaho. The Holocaust is not my specialty, but it has become a passionate exploration since I served as a high school English teacher in Idaho Falls, Idaho. The student population of my high school in 1999 was 99% white. We were reading the novel *Huckleberry Finn*. Since all of my students in this class was white, I wanted to help them understand what life was like outside of the White American perspective. With the help of the Diversity Coordinator for the Department of Energy, I found a man who was willing to speak to my class about being African American. He was originally born in Mississippi and agreed to speak to my 11th grade English class. We prepared for his visit by developing questions and thinking about what we wanted to know. Our guest speaker was accommodating and gracious. He gave valuable insight into his experience and the students asked poignant questions. I thought the experience was valuable and the students left still talking about the presentation. When I went to my car that night, it was covered with white supremacist fliers filled with racial slurs and antisemitic statements. This experience left me shaken and angry.

At the same time of this experience, I had a freshman student who filled his journal with antisemitic rants, threats against minorities, and a general hatred for anyone who supported social justice. I was so disturbed that I brought these journal entries to my principal, who consulted with our resource officer. He began reading and copying these journal entries, building a case against this student. Through his investigation, our resource officer discovered that this young man was a member of a white supremacist cell. He or another member of this cell had plastered my car with the antisemitic fliers.

I struggled with my teacher's commitment to the ardent antisemitic student. I talked with him privately on multiple occasions to try and help him understand another perspective, to help him see the hate in his words. I knew where his hate would eventually lead, and I tried to prevent him being arrested. I could never break through the hard veneer of his antisemitism. He was arrested two months after we began copying his threats against other students.

This experience launched my interest in the Holocaust and antisemitism. I didn't understand how a person could allow their emotions to cloud their logic. Beginning that year and extending throughout my teaching career, I have dedicated myself to social justice issues. I developed a social justice unit that I taught regularly as part of the 11th grade English curriculum. Students were required to read a text from another racial or ethnic group and then interview someone from that group. Although there were not a lot of cultural groups in Idaho Falls, with the help of the Diversity Coordinator, we found enough people that my students could interview. The unit became a great success as measured by student feedback and I was grateful to have the opportunity to help my students envision outside of their own cultural perspective.

I took my knowledge and applied it to other educational settings. I finished the last nine years of my career at an alternative high school. I continued to help our teachers and students see things from other peoples' perspectives. Our staff designed and carried out various service projects for older members of our communities, for veterans, for homeless individuals, for abused women, and other culturally relevant projects. The lessons that I learned from that antisemitic students drove me to incorporate social justice as a major tenet of any educational venture I undertook.

In 2014, I accepted a position as an English education professor at BYU-Idaho. I quickly found that the same student demographic from my high school English classes exists at BYU-Idaho. We have international students, but they are a small minority. We also have a few African-American, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian students. Most of my students have

interacted with members of different races or ethnicities in their home states, but many have never interacted with a Jewish person. I find that many students perpetuate antisemitic attitudes and beliefs because they don't understand or have never been exposed to Jewish history or Judaism. I certainly can't correct all of these misconceptions, but I try in my own limited way.

I have taught a Holocaust themed freshman English course at BYU-Idaho since 2017. I have floundered, trying to find the best way to teach this course effectively. I have attended the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on several occasions, trying to enhance my knowledge of the Holocaust. I also took my sabbatical this past fall semester and toured Auschwitz and other Holocaust sites in Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic. I have gained much useful information about the Holocaust, but I am unsure how to use that information to help my students be able to explore and apply the lessons from the Holocaust.

My efforts to teach this course have come through trial and error. I lack a support group of professors that could help me think about, design, and implement effective instruction. I have used a focused approach, where we read a Holocaust text (Doris Bergen's *The Holocaust: A Concise History*) and approached the course like a history course. Students were required to read this book and write a synthesis essay and a group research paper about the Holocaust. This course was effective in exposing my students to the history of the Holocaust. However, there was not enough time to spend reflecting and connecting the Holocaust to their lives.

The next iteration of the course was to approach the Holocaust through the lens of the five major groups: victims, perpetrators, bystanders, resistance, and rescuers. We read one book from each of the groups: *Night* for the victims, *Ordinary Men* for perpetrators, *Neighbors* for bystanders, *Beyond Courage* for the resistance, and *In My Hands* for the rescuers. We discussed these books in groups during the semester and wrote a synthesis essay and a group research paper. Once again, each student learned a lot about the Holocaust through these stories, but there wasn't enough time to dig deep into connecting the Holocaust to their lives.

The final iteration of this class is to read two books in common, *Night* and *Ordinary Men*. After reading these books, students get into groups and read a book by a bystander, a rescuer, or a resister. This cut down the amount of reading and offered more time on the writing, but there still isn't enough time to help the students apply the lessons of the Holocaust.

I have been frustrated by the inability to design a course that both gives history of the Holocaust and provides students the ability to connect with the Holocaust in a meaningful way. I feel guilty that I haven't been able to provide my students with the necessary framework to make this course a valuable learning experience.

One of my goals in applying to this institute is to find effective ways to teach my Holocaust courses. I am familiar with inquiry and have viewed some teachers using inquiry in their classrooms. It seems very effective at both engaging students and allowing the teacher to become a facilitator of knowledge. What I am currently doing is not allowing enough student empowerment. I direct most of the learning opportunities for students. I would like to be able to help them take more control in the classroom and find their own purpose for studying the Holocaust.

Another goal is to help my students connect the Holocaust to their lives. Too many of my students have learned about the Holocaust but have not engaged with the Holocaust in a meaningful way. I would like to collaborate with other teachers and institute directors to find effective ways to help my students learn about and apply the lessons of the Holocaust.

I want to be able to collaborate with other educators who are engaged in teaching the Holocaust. At my university, there is one other person who teaches about the Holocaust. We

don't communicate because she is a historian, and I am an English teacher. It makes this work very difficult because I can't discuss concerns or questions. I would welcome a group of people that could help me develop and implement ideas and strategies for teaching an effective course. It is hard to make adjustments to curriculum or texts without the ability to bounce these ideas off someone else.

Finally, I teach English writing and reading methods courses for pre-service teachers. Many of my students come from states that require Holocaust education. I want to expose them to effective methods of teaching the Holocaust and other genocides in their courses. I want to also provide the necessary structure that can help them succeed as teachers of the Holocaust when they return to their states as teachers.

Ultimately, fulfilling these goals will allow my students to have a better experience learning about the Holocaust and being able to connect the lessons of the Holocaust to their lives. My students will be the beneficiaries of this institute through what I learn and implement.

I come to this institute with some questions that have been arisen as I have taught the Holocaust. I have always been intrigued by memory and the Holocaust, particularly how perpetrators and victims talk, write, and remember the Holocaust. I am particularly interested in this question: How did the perpetrators and the victims talk about their experiences to their children and grandchildren?

Another question that I have often wondered about is the relationship between religion and perpetration in the Holocaust. I would like to know if there is a connection between someone's professed religious beliefs and their ability to participate or condone acts of the Holocaust?

I am intrigued by memorialization of the Holocaust, whether that be actual memorials or commemorative events. I have visited many of these commemorative sites and have often wondered if these memorials or memorialization have the desired effect of preventing future genocides?

I am interested in the connection between the Holocaust and modern genocides. In particular, how does the Holocaust connect to the Rwandan genocide and the Cambodian genocide and other 20th century genocides?

I have wondered how a society rebuilds itself after a horrific event like the Holocaust. How does the average citizen of a country like Germany remember the Holocaust, how do they recover from the Holocaust, and how do they return to pre-Holocaust life with the trauma of the Holocaust?

I welcome the opportunity to participate in this seminar. I know that I would gain valuable resources that would enhance my instruction and help my students have a wonderful learning experience. I appreciate you considering my application materials and I look forward to hearing from you.