

My name is Jane Nesbit, and I am passionate about Holocaust education. This passion is a newly acquired emotion. Until six months ago I was a resident of Charlotte, North Carolina where for seven years I taught World History, AP World History and American History I and II at Mallard Creek High School. Then last summer I moved to Omaha, Nebraska, and in my job search I saw an opening for the Education Coordinator for the Institute for Holocaust Education. I figured as a history teacher I was equipped to fill this position. What I wasn't prepared for was my intense commitment to the work, and the different needs and demands of teaching the Holocaust versus teaching other historical periods through my work at the Institute for Holocaust Education.

One of these needs arises from a newly created demand for resources to the subject of the Holocaust and other genocides in all Nebraska schools, a need mandated by a new law, LB888, approved April 13, 2022. A decision has not been made yet as to which grades this law applies or how much time will be devoted to the subject, but I do know that teachers in all grades will scramble for best practices, age-appropriate materials and resources to address this added requirement to their curriculum. This is one place where I believe the Initiative at Penn State can help me create a plan meeting this need. I will not be alone in the educational support of teachers, Nebraska has an organization of Holocaust teachers, fittingly called the Nebraska Holocaust Education Consortium, of which I am a member. That organization plus the Executive Board of the Nebraska State Council for Social Studies, on which I sit, are perfect places to bring ideas for inquiry-based and responsible pedagogy for teaching Holocaust and other genocides.

Another important goal I have in guiding Holocaust and genocide education is using the history and survivor stories to foster empathy in students, to help them become better and more vigilant citizens and to be upstanders when the need arises. I am excited to see that this is one of the goals of the Penn State's Initiative: to offer insight into the "human condition and life skills of empathy, active listening, critical thinking, civic discourse and agency." I would benefit from this aspect of the program, helping me in my effort to be more confident in initiating conversations and discussions that will encourage self-analysis and challenge the biases students harbor in themselves, their peer group and in their own and other communities.

Another challenge for me is that as a classroom teacher I had fixed classrooms of over 175 students a year. But in my role as Education Coordinator for the Institute for Holocaust Education, I am now an educator and an educator of educators, making the entire state of Nebraska my classroom. In this role, aside from offering workshops to teachers in curricular materials, such as Echoes and Reflections, I would like to guide teachers in weeding through other resources they may have in order to choose the most effective, relevant, and appropriate resources for their students. In doing this, I also want to offer teachers best practices to help support them in their search in learning and teaching about these difficult topics.

In addition to working with classroom teachers, I am also assisting graduate students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha who plan on becoming social studies and English teachers. My work with these in-service teachers is in a limited capacity, but I see my potential impact on them as very important. Seeing how to integrate Holocaust and genocide studies into their social studies and English classes with resources that best suit the unique needs of new teachers teaching difficult topics is crucial to their comfort in introducing these challenging subjects. It is through the Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Education Initiative that I hope to be able to provide further support and best practices to these future teachers and to the other many teachers of Nebraska.

The Institute for Holocaust Education has been in existence since 2000. Over the years it has developed a number of programs that are very effective and popular with schools and the community. Consequently, they have been repeated annually. One of these programs is called Art and the Holocaust, designed for middle school art classes where the students study basic Holocaust history and learn local survivor stories. From photos and using different media, the students then choose a survivor to draw their portrait. Every year hundreds of students from many different schools participate; teachers choose from their many students' work to be hung in the gallery at the Jewish Community Center, and a reception for parents and the community is held. Other annual programs also involve multiple schools and culminate in a program for teachers, students and their families. These programs are excellent ways to educate students about the Holocaust and its impact on individual lives, as well as the many paths survivors took to rebuild their lives in our community. The programs are aimed at middle school and high school students, but they also involve, impact and educate parents and families in a peripheral way.

Yet another way the Institute for Holocaust Education has reached out to the community in our effort to educate about the Holocaust has been through collaboration with various cultural arts organizations. These collaborations tend to be one-time limited performances, such as the production of the play *Brundibar*. For this program the Omaha symphony and the Rose Children's Theater collaborated with the Institute for Holocaust Education to put on a week of performances while busing in 8th grade classes from all over the area. Each performance culminated with a survivor from the original Terezin cast speaking to the students. It is this type of collaborative arts programming that I hope to learn more about at Penn State's Initiative. Being part of a cohort of Holocaust educators would have many advantages for me. A cohort group allows for building on existing skills, knowledge, and experiences of the group's members. Everyone can benefit from the sharing of ideas and serving as a sounding board for others. Plus, the members of the cohort can discuss challenges and provide advice especially as we will continue to meet through out the year. Engagement among learners creates community and since I like to teach and learn collaboratively, the prospect of learning with peer support and assistance as a community is one of the most attractive aspects of Penn State's Initiative. This is especially true as I hope to gain longtime relationships with other Holocaust educators and how they might address challenging topics like the Holocaust and other genocides in their classrooms. My goal is to continue these relationships so that we can all work together to address the needs of our students and community through the lessons of the Holocaust and other genocides.

Scott Littky, the Executive Director of the Institute for Holocaust Education, originally brought the Penn State's program to my attention. He has been very encouraging and hopeful that I will be accepted into the program and indicated he will support me in using the time needed to gain the most from the program. In addition to Mr. Littky, the Board of Directors of the Institute for Holocaust Education also fully endorsed my attendance at the program, feeling it will both benefit me as an educator of educators and the future of the Institute.

In regard to the questions I would like to discuss with a cohort of Holocaust educators, my first question deals with one of the issues raised by the loss of our survivor community. Eli Wiesel said:

"I believe firmly and profoundly that whoever listens to a witness becomes a witness, so those who hear us, those who read us must continue to bear witness for us. Until now, they're doing it with us. At a certain point in time, they will do it for all of us."

Dr. Wiesel's last line in the above quote deeply worries me since the time for the loss of the survivor community is now. We all agree that the impact of the survivor testimonies is irreplaceable. With the rise of antisemitism, we need the impact and relevance of the survivor stories more than ever. What are the most effective substitutes to the first person, in-person accounts?

My next question relates to the influences of the internet on antisemitism, hatred, and racism. I hear many young people voicing their frustration with the constant bombardment of negative news, misinformation, and "fake" news. They ask how they can combat the negative effects of the internet, and I would welcome help in being able to answer these students constructively.

Another question arises from state mandates to teach and to memorialize the Holocaust. Among some there is protest to the idea of teaching a particular genocide when so many other groups of people also have a history of persecution and oppression. How do we respond to that point of view?

Some religious Jews and clergy believe and teach that the Jews themselves are to blame for the Holocaust because of their "failure" to follow the laws of God. How does one respectfully respond to such a claim?

In reflecting over what videos, pictures, and texts educators think are inappropriate to use with middle and high school students because they are "too" much: too graphic or too heartbreaking. How might teachers select appropriate material for middle school and high school students?

Being comfortable asking these questions and the many more that will inevitably arise in study and discussion is a very significant reason why I hope I am accepted into the Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Education Initiative at Penn State, part of the Hammel Family Human Rights Initiative. The experience of the Penn State's Initiative promises to be a very meaningful and rewarding step towards becoming an effective Holocaust educator. I thank you for your time and consideration in reviewing my application.