

## Mary Nolt: Holocaust and Genocide Education Application Essay

The understanding and skills taught by the study of history and the social sciences are an integral part of humanity. I have always been interested in history and went to James Madison University to major in Interdisciplinary Social Sciences and minor in Secondary Education. Upon graduation in 2009, I then completed the teaching certification process for secondary social studies education at Millersville University and immediately started substitute teaching. In 2011, I was hired at Manheim Central High School. I have taught a variety of social studies courses at Manheim Central High School since I was hired including American Government, American History, and European History. I am currently teaching Doing History, History of Leaders and Leadership, and Advanced Placement United States History to ninth graders. I have been teaching these courses for several years and feel confident in the structure and design of these classes. I also created two new courses entitled History and Legacy of Imperialism and Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing that are primarily for sophomores. The Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing course explores the establishment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Herero-Nama and Armenian genocides, the Holocaust, and the genocide in Rwanda and closes with a case study of a student's choosing. These two courses are currently being taught and honed. The idea behind these courses came to fruition when our social studies department took the time to re-examine our courses to make them more inquiry, or problem based, and allow students more options in history electives, especially for underclassmen, rather than just the traditional American History and European History courses. In addition to the classes I teach, I am also the Social Studies Instructional Facilitator for the high school. As part of this responsibility, I attend bi-monthly meetings with other Instructional Facilitators from the elementary, middle, and high schools led by the Director of Curriculum and Instruction to discuss important ideas and concepts surrounding our educational programs. I then take this information and share it with the six other members of my department. In this position, I also serve as a sounding board and provide support to my colleagues as needed. Additionally, I also coach the middle school field hockey team and have been coaching in this capacity since I was hired in 2011. I have the help of an assistant and parent volunteer. Moreover, the head coach of the program and our booster club are supportive of and inclusive in everything the middle school team does or needs. This is a position I love. Not only do I have the chance to teach the fundamentals and love of the game of field hockey but also encourage young players to be better people, a philosophy the head coach of the program and myself share. When players come to the high school, I often have them in class and it is incredible to watch their growth not only on the field, but as people. I earned my master's degree in History in 2017 from Millersville University and have used the content and concepts taught to continue to develop and guide my instruction. The interactions I have in the classroom, with my colleagues, and on the field, help to make me a well-rounded learning facilitator who is passionate about continuing to learn and grow to serve my students and community.

Our high school social studies department is scheduled for curriculum re-evaluation during the 2023-2024 school year, and I was looking online for opportunities to advance and grow two new courses I wrote during the COVID-19 lockdown. When school was shut down and we were transitioning to a new mode of learning, I developed two possible history electives for sophomores: History and Legacy of Imperialism and Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing. These

courses were approved and have been well received by students, who max out the course seats for each section offered. I curated my resources and relied on past education as there were no funds or formal time offered for the creation of the new courses, but since we were all at home, I had the time. I was exploring summer professional development opportunities and came across the sponsorship by the National Endowment for Humanities: Making Holocaust and Genocide Education Relevant Through Inquiry and Classroom Application via Penn State. This institute immediately grabbed my attention due to the inquiry component. The three compelling questions for the Institute align with exactly what I want my course about Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing to be focused on. The particular question regarding *What were the ramifications of the Holocaust during the war, postwar, and for the world today?* interests me and I immediately thought of a lesson on antisemitism today that I do with students. As we examine antisemitism through resources from *Facing History and Ourselves* and data from the Anti-Defamation League, students' eyes are opened to antisemitism not only locally and regionally, but globally, which often leaves them with more questions than answers. These questions help to foster both teacher and student collaboration and allow us all to make connections to the world around us. For social studies, I believe inquiry-based learning is the future and allows us as educators to keep our content relevant and up-to-date, while also teaching valuable skills. I also noticed that the institute consists of two parts, the Summer Residency, and the Post-Residency, which is also something that appeals to me. When discussing and planning over the summer the time comes easily, but I like the accountability with relevant sessions that will continue throughout the Post-Residency, such as "Responsible Use of Media in Holocaust and Genocide Education" and collecting and interpreting data when it comes to inquiry. I do find that data when it comes to the study of social studies is harder to conceptualize, and in a time where schools base decisions on data, I think this is a very valuable component to ensure the relevancy and importance of social studies, in addition to the current focus on STEM that is taking place in my district. Additionally, as the Instructional Facilitator I have the opportunity to take what I have learned and share it with our three new hires as well as our veteran teachers.

I am interested in attending this Institute to further develop the current course I am teaching, Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing, and facilitate its growth. The focus on inquiry-based learning is something our department has been transitioning to with our curriculum. This opportunity would allow me the chance to delve into inquiry-based learning with experts and educators who I can learn and grow from. I have been utilizing online resources through Buck Institute for Education, PBL Works, and John Spencer, but I do think a more focused and formalized approach, along with the ability to collaborate with my peers would be a very valuable and rewarding experience. The sessions offered during the Summer Residency and those that are offered virtually appear not only interesting but thought-provoking. These sessions lend themselves to teaching not only about the Holocaust but can be applied to other genocides and teaching difficult topics and subjects in history. Several of the sessions immediately struck a chord with me and the type of teaching I want to do. The session entitled "Refugees from the Holocaust: Human Agency, Divergent Experiences, and Relevance for the World Today" frames the power of Nazi policies while also exploring this topic through the lens of the refugees. So often I feel the study of the Holocaust and genocide education is focused on those in power and portrays the victims as nameless faces, or just numbers that students have a hard time fathoming.

Being able to make connections to people and understand their stories creates a stronger understanding of the historical event, while also making historical connections, after all, history is ultimately about people as one of my graduate professors, Dr. Dennis Downey, shared. The sessions on Tuesday, June 27<sup>th</sup> are geared toward the victims and survivors, and I am particularly interested in the incorporation of recent historical scholarship that examines perpetrators, bystanders, and victims. The screening of *Cojot* also sounds especially relevant when it comes to how we as educators select media that is powerful but does not traumatize students. This is especially true in a world where COVID-19 has brought to light the social and mental health issues that staff and students are trying and struggling to grapple with. The community-based inquiry to Philadelphia to tour the Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History and the Horwitz-Wasserman Holocaust Memorial Plaza is a great way to incorporate field trips and travel again. I have never planned or coordinated a field trip for students before due to being a new teacher and then the COVID-19 pandemic hit and there were no opportunities afforded for field trips. I want to take my students on field trips again with restrictions being lifted, so I am looking for a practical and applicable way to make field trips not just a day off for students from school, but an enriching experience that compliments the classroom content and material. Due to my school's proximity to Philadelphia, I also feel like this could be a valuable experience that would enhance my curriculum and be an important part of my courses. Finally, in a school that is growing in diversity I believe attending this institute would equip me with the opportunity to grow and cultivate historical understanding and empathy. Society today is fraught with tension and a general lack of empathy for others, which is becoming more prevalent in schools. Learning about and teaching empathy is a great way to start to heal the divide that has worked itself into our schools and communities.

I know the institute is focused on the Holocaust, genocide, and human rights education, but I am interested in learning more about the application to current events. I find students learn best when they can relate what they are learning to the world that they know, which may be very different from the world I know, or the world I wish they knew. Practical application of history through current events is something I strive for in all my units and this is something I cannot wait to learn more about. When teaching about the Holocaust and genocide I want to invoke a sense of empathy and history while also acknowledging students' different experiences and academic and social and emotional needs, which is why I am curious about what responsible classroom inquiry looks like. Learning more about responsible classroom inquiry is something we can all strive to and continually improve, and something that I feel can not only guide my instruction for my Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing course but the other courses I teach. I am also interested in learning more about how to teach the scale and scope of the Holocaust. The other genocides we examine in our course are much shorter in length and a bit more straightforward. But the sheer numbers and involvement, coupled with the amount of scholarship that has been written about the Holocaust can be overwhelming. Learning more about curating and using appropriate resources and ensuring my historical scholarship is up to date is something I am looking forward to if accepted into this institute. Contextualization is also an important component for any study of history, and I am curious about how the Holocaust will be contextualized and am eager to learn more about teaching the context of the Holocaust, while also acknowledging the

contributions of the Jewish people to history before and after the Holocaust and the virulent role of antisemitism throughout history, even before the rise of Adolf Hitler.

Teaching about the Holocaust and genocide is a difficult subject, and I often find a lot of my students are unfamiliar with and lack awareness about the Holocaust and other genocides in history. Thank you for putting on this institute and for the opportunity to apply to Making Holocaust and Genocide Education Relevant Through Inquiry and Classroom Application. Having the chance to learn more about proper pedagogy is something I hope to be able to do this summer while getting the opportunity to collaborate with other educators. Thank you for your time and consideration.