

As a queer Jewish educator living and working in Iowa, I have engaged in my fair share of difficult conversations. I seek admission to the Institute on Making Holocaust and Genocide Relevant Through Inquiry and Classroom Application to buttress my efforts to bring such conversations to scholarly and civic light in spheres where I teach, in a way that is appropriately thoughtful and sensitive to growing young people.

By way of context, my name is Mallory Hellman, and I've been working in K-12 education and arts administration since 2012. Over the last eleven years, I've taught in- and after-school writing and literacy workshops for thousands of students in Iowa, Indiana, and Illinois. I spent nine summers teaching creative writing, debate, and myths and legends at the (now discontinued) Duke University Talent Identification Program. In my current capacity as an arts administrator, I train and prepare undergraduate students to lead K-12 writing workshops; their training includes thoughtful curricular development, classroom management skills, and cultural competency.

Since 2015, I have served as the executive director of the Iowa Youth Writing Project (IYWP), a K-12 arts outreach organization based at the University of Iowa that empowers and inspires young people through writing and creativity. Each year, the IYWP brings weekly writing workshops to ~25 local schools and community centers, holds workshops with visiting authors, hosts readings and events for young people, and gathers K-12 writers in meaningful conversation about the power and practice of art.

After working with Professor Kirsten Kumpf Baele to involve youth education and outreach in the planting of an Anne Frank chestnut sapling at the University of Iowa last year, I was appointed to the University's Anne Frank Initiative. The Initiative exists to bring awareness to the Anne Frank sapling here on campus and to interleave other elements of Anne Frank's life and story—her work as a writer, her status as a young person, her Jewishness—more deliberately into day-to-day life at the University. My particular capacity within the Initiative involves youth outreach and engagement: specifically, the planning and execution of at least two annual events that bring local K-12 students into conversation about Anne Frank's diary, the Holocaust, or other elements of her story.

In its first iteration, this youth event took the form of a three-part digital workshop I led for students aged 11-14 under the auspices of the Iowa Youth Writing Project. Students in the workshop learned about Anne Frank and her experience in the Holocaust, read excerpts from her diary, and engaged in conversation and creative writing, with prompts based in the diary. At the culmination of the workshop, students were invited to submit their written work to a worldwide contest whose winners read at the planting of the chestnut sapling.

This workshop series was my first and only time teaching the Holocaust; I devised the creative writing portion of the curriculum and chose the diary excerpts, and Professor Kumpf Baele authored the history sections.

A final piece of the pedagogical puzzle: As of September 2022, I am a member of the Sunday school faculty at Agudas Achim synagogue in Coralville, Iowa. In this capacity, I work weekly with a group of students aged 11-13 on *tefilah* (Hebrew for prayer), Jewish history, and cultural learning. My class maintains a focus on global Judaisms: how Judaism is practiced, is recognized, and is treated by majority populations in countries around the world. This study involves a globally-focused history of Jewish life and a celebration of the many ways in which Judaism is observed and practiced today.

Over the years I've spent teaching and working in youth outreach, I've noticed—with increasing urgency in recent years—two trends: 1) young people crave engagement with topics applicable to the *real world*, and 2) especially in my corner of the country, students (even Jewish ones) are woefully underexposed to discussions of Jewish identity, history, and experience. The first of these discoveries didn't shock me, but the second one did.

I am the grandchild of Holocaust survivors. Growing up, I didn't have to go far to find first-hand stories from the *shoa* or to get recommendations for literature by and about survivors. I spent most of my childhood in South Florida, where a strong Jewish plurality led to a curricular emphasis on Holocaust studies in history class. At the time, I knew that children across the country weren't getting the same level of exposure to this material, but I was unaware of just how many students weren't getting it at all.

When I started working in K-12 classrooms, bringing Holocaust education to my students felt selfish. I am, after all, a creative writing instructor, and, as such, have received more than one administrative slap on the wrist for letting my classroom conversations get too “political.” I've had assigned reading material censored. I've had funders express concern that student writing strayed from “safe” topics. That never stopped me from encouraging students to express themselves fully, but it did, especially in early years, keep my workshop topic selection circumscribed. Teaching about the Holocaust felt like a passion project, one for which I'd be unlikely to garner much support.

My feelings about teaching the *shoa* and other genocides began to burn more urgently in recent years. As instances of antisemitic violence have risen repeatedly to national prominence, and as I continue to meet Iowan youth who know nothing about the history or identity of Jewish people living in their midst, I realized that to teach the Holocaust would not be selfish; it would be an act of social and civic necessity. I just needed the tools.

When I expressed to a Sunday school class parent that I would be interested in implementing a Holocaust curriculum to complement our study of Jews in India, China, and the Caribbean in future years, she referred me to this Institute.

The description of this Institute resonated with me because, at present, I lack two essential resources when it comes to teaching the Holocaust: 1) an expert-level scholarly (as opposed to lived/anecdotal) understanding of the Holocaust and 2) a team of peers also committed to teaching the topic. My hope is that the Institute will help me to brush

up on my knowledge and choose which topics within and surrounding the Holocaust I'd like to teach. I'm even more excited about the collaborative aspect of the experience; I would treasure the opportunity to work with fellow educators to share best practices for teaching difficult material, to compare experiences, and to serve as a support network in the preparation and implementation of the material.

To that end, I appreciate that the Institute is an ongoing experience and offers support beyond the five-day residency in Pennsylvania. As an educator, I've attended all too many workshops that involve a heady few days of brainstorming with no follow-up, which is a recipe for an unsustainable project. I am committed to begin teaching the Holocaust in 2023-24, and I think the ongoing support structure of the Institute will be an invaluable tool in making that project feasible.

Finally, I appreciate the interdisciplinary scope of this Institute. My status as a religious school teacher and creative writing educator exempt me from many similar gatherings, which tend to focus exclusively on classroom teachers from public schools. Beyond that, I think integrating perspectives from educators outside traditional social studies/history classrooms can only benefit discussions such as ours. With its solid academic grounding, ambitious mission, and generosity of scope, this Institute seems like the perfect place for me to find and learn from supportive peers.

I hope that, after the June session of the Institute, I will return to Iowa with the draft of a curriculum that I can adapt to use both as a long-term unit of study in my Sunday school classroom and as a jumping-off point for the series of events I host through the Anne Frank Initiative.

Below, I list some questions I'd like to consider through my participation in the Institute:

1. As a transplant to the American heartland and an instructor of global Judaisms, I'm fascinated by the concept of "Jews in unlikely places." How does one approach topics of Jewish history—particularly our several brushes with genocide—in a place where not even that history's descendants have a fundamental grasp of the material? How do we teach those uninitiated in the topic toward sensitivity and understanding?
2. Teaching genocide can have the adverse pedagogical effect of allowing students to believe that a people's whole history is as bleak as its darkest moment. How can I teach the Holocaust without abandoning notions of Jewish thriving, Jewish achievement, and Jewish joy?
3. How can a Holocaust curriculum thoughtfully dovetail with writing or other creative projects?
4. Students crave curricular material that is directly applicable to their lives and their futures. I'm interested in exploring ways in which I can connect the Holocaust to

present-day genocides and socio-cultural oppression. That said, I am particularly interested in *not* having this inquiry result in a stagnant, doom-and-gloom pronouncement of, “Society is broken, and it can never be fixed.” I’d like to explore methods of creating *possibility* within the parallels between the Holocaust and our current struggles; how does an awareness of human behavior patterns surrounding power, difference, and oppression equip us to fight human rights violations today?

Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for taking the time and resources to consider my application to the Institute. If accepted, I will not take this incredible opportunity for granted.

Sincerely,



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