

A Human[e] Experience

Miss Katherine Engemann

Hermann High School

Pennsylvania State University

Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education Initiative

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My name is Katie Engemann. I am a Social Studies teacher at Gasconade County R-I High School in Hermann, Missouri; I teach World History, World Geography, and Economics. I grew up in Marthasville, Missouri: a town of 1,258 people. Growing up, diversity and oppression were words that I was fortunate enough only to experience through literature. This vocabulary gained meaning during my eighth grade year when our class attended a field trip to Washington D.C. We visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Eleven years later I can still smell the overpowering scent of leather from shoes, and I can still vividly see photos of families who were victimized during the Holocaust. When I reflect on that day, I get goosebumps. Coming back from Washington D.C., I was extremely motivated to be a passionate advocate for empathy and awareness around the events which shape people's actions. This trip captivated my interest and encouraged me to absorb any additional information I could regarding the Holocaust and a drive to share all of my findings with others.

As a new teacher, I strive to give students the opportunity to explore and to prepare them for their future. Students develop skills like empathy, a communication of their thoughts, a reflection about a situation or source, and a connection to what they learn. Many of my students grasp the concepts and are able to elaborate to others because of issues they have faced in their lives outside of school. My approach to teaching is a more indirect style. I facilitate a student's educational experience through inquiry method activities. These activities empower students to discover information and this allows me to diversify for the different kinds of learners within my classroom. I give students the opportunity to vocalize their thoughts instead of internalizing them. I want to give them opportunities to create connections of empathy, humility, and seeking justice for the individuals impacted by each event.

One of the classes I teach is World Geography. The World Geography course provides the freedom to elaborate on historical and cultural issues regarding the natives and residents of all continents. When a student studies a continent, it allows students to gain a better perspective of who these groups of people are and how they have lived. It allows students to bridge connections to these individuals and at times relate their own experiences to others, allowing them to make connections with people halfway across the world. Helping to influence the shaping of student mindset furnishes the occasion to generate more globally responsible individuals. Students become less self-oriented in their manners of comprehension and reaction. Then taking transitional steps to establish a coalition within themselves to distinguish a more humanitarian and empathetic based role in the world. Diving into topics of the Holocaust and other genocides gives grounding in encompassing the student's personality evolution.

World History cycles through centuries of information and exclusion, building up to acts of genocide. Captivating student attention while presenting these topics also assists in the sequencing of the affairs of daily lives and the choices made within them. Expanding sequencing skill sets prepares students in recognizing thematic patterns and speculating regarding the future. Through my teaching, I am able to facilitate student learning through building blocks to establish a firm ground as we explore these challenging topics, which can provoke feelings that are not always dealt with in a typical classroom environment. By taking a deliberate and conscientious approach to unpack these topics, students are provided with the opportunity to be honest with the reality of how the world actually is and the events that they may have to deal with one day without the sheltering they receive currently in their young adult lives.

Economics confronts matters of reform and the impacts of the freedom of choice. As the students progress through the series of the matters of economics, they begin to understand the

power behind a choice that is made. There is no better reflection regarding the power of a choice than the Holocaust. In order to bring about the events of the Holocaust, the power of choice came into play from Nazis, resistance efforts, and ordinary citizens. The power of choice comes with consequences behind each action, whether it was to be involved in the efforts of the Nazi party, conform to their regulations, or to resist them. The overall causes and subsequent consequences of the Holocaust reflected the basics of wants and needs. The Germans and other nations wanted economic prosperity following the ending of World War I, but their means to achieve such standards were taken to levels never seen before in humanity. During the German takeover, the rights to basic needs became individualized not by humanity as a whole but by unrealistic ideals about ordinary people based on their beliefs or outward traits that were beyond their control. Following the liberation of the camps throughout Europe provided the entire continent with greater issues of supply and demand within each country. Would the victims of the Holocaust reside in the area they were brought to? Would the individuals scavenge throughout Europe to find family members before establishing their livelihood? Would those victimized individuals travel back to what was once their homes and if so what would they be faced with upon arrival? How would businesses and governments process through this newfound amount of unemployment, especially with the means of production for the war effort finished? Economics focuses on the logistics of issues, but by incorporating the Holocaust, it forces individuals to discard their logic and pivot to pure virtue. Life is not always based solely on data, which is one of the major reasons to educate others about the Holocaust and genocides.

I am applying to the Pennsylvania State University Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education Initiative because of the opportunities to further my education in both the knowledge of the Holocaust, learn different approaches in teaching the material to apply within my classroom, and create connections with other educators from across the nation. Applying to the Pennsylvania State University Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education Initiative will deepen my knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust, strengthen my teaching skills, and help me incorporate respectful and meaningful lessons about the Holocaust and genocides in my classes. This is my second year in education and my first year teaching this specific content. I continuously find myself learning new information to build my knowledge and skills when teaching a variety of topics. While attending college for my Bachelor's degree, I took an upper-level Nazi Germany and Holocaust course. This course reinforced the idea that although I have learned a lot about the Holocaust, there is so much more to learn. I yearn to acquire more to be able to better educate my students.

As a new teacher, I am excited to have the opportunity to learn different approaches in teaching the Holocaust and genocide within my classroom. Students learn better through a variety of ways because there are a variety of learners within my classroom. In addition, by offering alternative forms of inquiry-based education, students stay engaged. By providing critical thinking scenarios and problem solving skill sets, they will be able to develop these important life skills over the course of my class and apply outside of school and after they have completed their educational journey. This also allows interactions amongst the students to continue to build a classroom community.

Lastly, by applying to the Pennsylvania State University Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education Initiative, I will gain the opportunity to create connections with other educators from across the nation. This would be beneficial because it allows me to interact with others who have different experiences, approaches, and ideologies. I will be able to collaborate with others to develop new ways of teaching topics and enhance my current intentions. I would

also be able to share my approaches with others to help them build and develop programs within their schools as well. During my senior year of high school, I took College Credit Psychology and Sociology with Kerri Flynn. As I have continued my education, we have kept in touch. She has been devoted to helping me to being the best educator I can be by providing resources, providing direction in areas of concern, and advising me in my development as a professional. I believe by attending this initiative, I will be better connected to driven educators like Mrs. Flynn to continuously pursue the betterment of my career and provide a first-rate education for all of my students.

Attending this institute will help in supporting my teaching regardless of the content, while the content is still both meaningful and significant. In the district in which I currently teach, many of my students have significant personal and emotional baggage. Oftentimes, the topics I address are the last thing about which they want to think. However, I realize the importance of taking the time to unpack these topics because students in many instances need to be able to feel that safe space and have someone relate or at least be willing to understand the issues with which they were dealt. By addressing some of these heavy topics, students begin to realize that I am a trusted adult with which they can unpack their baggage. I am someone who is going to be less judgemental, more understanding, and more willing to listen because I see the impact that burdensome issues can have if not resolved or discussed. I recognize how crucial it is to form a wholesome classroom community and that the core of that begins with me. To cultivate a welcoming and safe environment, I need to reflect characteristics such as honesty, empathy, kindness, and passion. Although I encompass these characteristics, I believe that they will refine and continue to flourish throughout my career.

In addition, when I take part in the institute, it will be able to provide a more focused direction while I create a curricula outline for the upcoming academic year. This will show potential ways to progress responsibly from topic-to-topic, as well as allowing my students to understand how historical events can guide and bridge upcoming events within our curriculum. Being involved in this institute will help me to determine more crucial events and topics to highlight while teaching the rise of antisemitism, the effect of the abominations of the Holocaust, and the honorable efforts being made to atone for the atrocities experienced. There will be more deliberate and focused instruction in the process of my curriculum in regards to these topics as well as other major shifts within world history. I will be able to apply acquired knowledge toward the advancement of all of my course concepts in addition to future concepts I may teach in regards to bridging my skills.

I am a strong candidate for the Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Education Initiative by being composed of the qualities of grit, empathy, humility, respect, adaptability, consideration, creativity, and motivation. I strive to be more than just physically present at this institute while attending. The intent is to delve further in this fathomless content. I wholeheartedly wish to tap into the potential within myself so that I can resurrect a better established and intentional curriculum. I aim to bridge the skills acquired and I will continue to develop at this institute with the additional courses I will teach. Additionally, I propose to collaborate with colleagues within my school district in order to circulate this knowledge in hopes that the professional development and this meaningful message does not end with me. This initiative draws educators from across the nation to spread knowledge and collaborate with others who also are driven by cultivating the most successful environment for their students, which is the true purpose behind why I transpire to be an educator.

The questions I would like to have answered by attending this institution are:

1. *What are effective ways to transition and intertwine into Holocaust-related content?*
2. *What are the most effective lessons and projects about honoring individuals impacted by the Holocaust?*
3. *What would be a student approach for what should be done for consequences of those who helped commit this mass genocide?*
4. *What are the most effective resources that help to convey the deep realism of these topics?*
5. *How can I help create ways in which students can apply what they learn to their lives?*

I appreciate the time taken to review my application essay; if there are questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.