

# YOUR ROLE AS A DOCENT

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Docent, tour guide, volunteer, interpreter, instructor are all names given to those who translate, decode or guide visitors through exhibits. Your job will be to incite enthusiasm and interest in our visitors. There are three types of visitors that come to the exhibit: private and public schools (5th grade and up), community organizations, and individuals.

Please learn the educational objective of this exhibit: to educate students and visitors the consequences of hate, prejudice, and discrimination through the lessons of the Holocaust.

In order to do so, the educational initiatives are centered around exploring the choices of those involved in this period of history. The educational initiatives are outlined below:

1. **Hate and discrimination are taught.** They are not inborn traits, beliefs, behaviors.
2. **They were ordinary people.** Those involved in the Holocaust, no matter their role were ordinary people. Hitler and the Nazis did not act alone. They were not solely responsible for the Holocaust. Ordinary people made choices to act or not act and became complicit, collaborators, rescuers, or resistance.
3. **They made choices.** Explore behaviors, not categories of people; Actions are fluid and thus a person's choices should be the emphasis of study, not their categorization such as "bystander" or "perpetrator", etc.

By learning about the Holocaust in this way, the desired outcome is for students and visitors to understand that they have the power in their lives to make the right choices, and that their choice can make a difference. As educators, we do not want to tell them what the right choice is but teach them how to determine the right choice through their own critical thinking according to the moral lessons available from the Holocaust.

It is also extremely important to adhere to the guidelines for teaching the Holocaust from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This handout was provided to you upon orientation.

In addition to following these educational initiatives in the content of every tour, it is also important to be aware of how different audiences learn and process information.

- **5<sup>th</sup> Grade:** This age is just beginning to be aware of the judgments of their peers. They are eager learners, and have a high ability of absorbing new information, especially if you personalize it. Present the information at their level. They are highly influenced by TV and movies. Thus, talking about the propaganda and how it influences and affects these students is appropriate. This age group is interested in the why and how of things. Be prepared to weave questions and answers into your presentation because they like to compete with one another to give the right answers.
- **6-8<sup>th</sup> Grades:** This age group is developing rapidly and likes to question authority. They are extremely conscious of the judgment of their peers. They want to be unique, yet crave group approval. Teach clearly, but do not use too many big words or complex jargon.

- **9-12<sup>th</sup> Grades:** They may seem disinterested and unresponsive to what you say, only because they do not want to be singled out for attention. This age group is the least likely to respond to your questions. Try to be acquainted with current interests of adolescents so you relate to them in a contemporary way. Recognize their feelings, and do not talk down to them. If you show passion for what you are saying, it will keep them motivated and stimulated. They may come with low expectations that the experience will contribute to their lives in any way, but will be inspired if it is relevant to them.
- **Adults:** They like handouts and objective information.
- **Seniors:** Respect their knowledge, and realize that many of them have experienced the subject matter first hand. They like to participate and share their experiences, so invite them to become involved in the tour. Be aware of their physical limitations. Some may not be able to stand for long periods of time during explanations.

In all your tours, regardless of age group, please be sure to keep track of the time frame for each tour in order to avoid exceeding the allotted tour time. This is especially significant in large tour groups that must be split into smaller groups for multiple docents. When appropriate and using the exhibit context, share with the group why you decided to become a docent and verbalize why you feel connected to this material. This creates a rapport with the audience and highlights the content of the exhibit on a personal and related level. Although this exhibit contains serious subject matter, smile, share laughter and maintain steady eye contact with all age groups.

You will eventually personalize what you say and piece together your own techniques, skills and information to suit your comfort level. Use the script to start with until you determine your own style. You will learn that you really do know more about the subject matter than most visitors. It is very rewarding when you see a group's responsiveness and you will be able to know when they are connecting to what you are saying. Visitors for the most part are eager and willing participants.

Thank you for your contribution. We hope visitors will leave the exhibit thinking about the lessons of history in terms of their own lives, reflecting on how one's personal choices can impact the lives of those around them.