

## PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLES

### 1. Situate Learners: We Are Contributors to History, Not Witnesses

History does not change, but our interpretation of it does. Situate learners in history by building a shared understanding of how the past informs the present. Look at history not through a fixed lens like ‘bystander/upstander,’ but instead focus on how all the decisions we make in each moment, era, or circumstance reverberate long past our lifetimes. We are all contributors to history.

**Building historical thinking skills in students means collapsing the distances between historical eras and their current lives.**

#### In Practice:

- Challenge students to weave connections between historical and modern events, contextualizing the past within the present to identify patterns
- Recognize the lasting impact of the past on the present.
- Foster an understanding of the cyclical and repetitive nature of intolerance.

#### Caution:

- Avoid oversimplifying complex historical events into binary categories such as upstander/bystander, but rather center on a spectrum of responses.
- Be sensitive to participants’ own personal connections to historical systems of oppression to avoid traumatization.

**Encourage awareness of one’s role as an influencer, creator, and consumer of media in society, promoting critical thinking and responsible engagement.**

#### In Practice:

- Text-to-self questions like, “How did Anne Frank see herself being impacted by the political circumstances around her? How do you?” or “You just watched a testimony from a Holocaust survivor’s grandchild—how do patterns of history impact your family?”

#### Caution:

- Avoid facile comparisons. We are not living in the Holocaust; the Nazis were not ‘bullies,’ and COVID was not the same as being placed in the Warsaw Ghetto in the 1940s. Comparative paradigms diminish our understanding of the past and allow us to avoid uncomfortable confrontations about the present.

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### 2. Establish Shared Vocabulary

**Clarity and Precision:** Use accessible language to define key terms and concepts, connecting them with relevant historical and modern events to establish a shared understanding.

**Words matter:** Defining and establishing shared vocabulary should happen within the context of the lesson, with continuous reminders throughout. The power of teaching conceptual vocabulary is to unlock a deeper understanding of causation, change, or significance. Language is always evolving; words can enrich and diversify our understanding of the past.

#### In Practice:

- Building vocabulary and key terms can alter how students view different historical phenomena and deserve our attention.
- Similarly, building a shared understanding as a group on terminology creates access for multilingual learners across various learning styles. Language is constantly evolving, and we seek to hold space for these shifts in language to honor cultural and social diversity.

#### Caution:

- Vocabulary can be cumbersome. Defining and establishing terms can often turn into a pre-lesson discussion on those terms. Vocabulary should be provided at the onset of lessons but not derail learning; it should emerge naturally from the arc of the lesson.

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### 3. Begin in Story, End in Story: Narrative as Transformational Change

All cultures throughout time have told stories. Thinking deeply about history as a story—and about the values and biases of the people who write those stories—is perhaps the most crucial work of human-centered education in practice. Stories have the power to cultivate emotional connection, break down barriers, and even construct basic media literacy precepts.

#### In Practice:

- **Storytelling Sparks Connection:** Design spaces—both physical and digital—where students are empowered to share and respond to personal and communal narratives, fostering dialogue and self-expression. By engaging with diverse perspectives through storytelling circles, literature discussions, multimedia projects, reflective writing, or through oral histories, students deepen both their self-awareness as well as their understanding of others' lived experiences, building empathy and creating connections across communities.

#### Caution:

- **Ethical Sensitivity:** Not all stories are meant to be shared publicly. Educators should be mindful of students' emotional safety and ensure that storytelling is always a choice, not a requirement.
- **Avoiding a Single Story:** Be cautious of narratives that oversimplify experiences or reinforce stereotypes. Encourage students to seek out multiple perspectives and engage critically with dominant narratives.
- **Facilitating with Care:** Discussions of personal or historical narratives can evoke strong emotions. Educators should be prepared to support students, provide content warnings, and maintain a respectful atmosphere.
- **Storytelling vs. Facts:** While stories are powerful tools for engagement, it is important to balance narrative approaches with analytical rigor, ensuring that storytelling enhances, —rather than replaces, —critical inquiry.





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### 4. Emotion as a Source of Knowledge

Emotions are not just reactions, but fundamental ways of knowing. They shape perception, inform decision-making, and deepen engagement with history, society, and self. Recognizing emotions as valid and valuable sources of knowledge allows learners to develop greater empathy, self-awareness, and critical insight. In educational settings, embracing emotional engagement can foster deeper connections to content, encourage civic responsibility, and enhance social-emotional learning (SEL).

#### In Practice:

- **Emotion as Insight:** Encourage learners to explore how emotions provide critical understanding of historical, social, and ethical issues. Facilitate discussions that highlight emotional responses as integral to interpreting events, literature, and lived experiences.
- **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Integration:** Design learning experiences that incorporate SEL principles, helping students develop self-awareness, social awareness, and emotional regulation. This can be achieved through reflective journaling, guided discussions, or role-playing exercises.
- **Empathy Through Emotional Honesty:** Foster an environment where emotional expression is valued. Encourage learners to engage in storytelling, dialogue, and self-reflection to build deeper connections with content and with each other.
- **Engagement Through Emotional Connection:** Utilize narrative, art, and participatory activities to help learners emotionally invest in the material. Whether through historical reenactments, literature analysis, or discussions of current events, create spaces where students can process and connect emotionally.

#### Caution:

- **Balance Emotion with Critical Thinking:** Emotional engagement should be measured and thoughtful rather than reactive. Avoid quick, impulsive responses in favor of investigation and analysis to ensure depth and clarity.
- **Create Safe Spaces:** Discussions involving emotion can be personal; establish guidelines for respectful dialogue and support. Acknowledge intersectional factors linked to participants' own lived experiences, which may influence feelings of safety.
- **Avoid Emotional Manipulation:** Be aware that emotions are processed on different timelines. Encourage organic emotional connections rather than forcing reactions.
- **Recognize Emotional Diversity:** Not all students process emotions in the same way. There are multiple ways to engage.

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### 5. Tikkun Olam: Repair Your World – Emphasize Local History and Local Action

Repairing our world is a core Jewish value, and often, the most transformational actions occur in “small places, close to home.” Local history and local action should be emphasized as pathways to civic understanding and engagement. History is most powerful when it feels personal. Local history provides students with an accessible, immediate connection to the past, helping them see how historical forces shape their own communities and lives. By embracing microhistory—a method that uncovers the lived experiences of ordinary people—educators can move beyond national master narratives to highlight diverse perspectives and grassroots movements. Teaching history through local stories fosters civic responsibility, critical thinking, and a deeper commitment to democratic participation.

#### In Practice:

- **Microhistory as a Tool for Engagement:** Encourage students to investigate how larger historical forces have played out in their own communities. This could include examining local labor movements, civil rights struggles, or migration patterns.
- **History as a Living Narrative:** Connect the past to contemporary issues, demonstrating how local history informs present-day social and political dynamics.
- **Democratic Learning through Participation:** Use oral history projects, walking tours, or archival research to engage students in active history-making. Empower them to uncover and share stories that challenge dominant narratives.
- **Integrating Technology and Public History:** Leverage digital platforms for mapping, timelines, and virtual exhibitions to make history more interactive and accessible.

#### Caution:

- **Navigating Controversial Histories:** Local history can reveal difficult truths. Educators should be prepared to facilitate discussions about racial injustice, economic inequality, and contested historical narratives.
- **Addressing Institutional Resistance:** Some communities may resist confronting uncomfortable histories. Educators should approach these topics with sensitivity while advocating for historical accuracy.
- **Ethical Considerations in Oral History:** When collecting community stories, ensure ethical practices such as informed consent, respectful storytelling, and the protection of vulnerable voices.

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### 6. Primary Sources and Experiential Learning

Critical study of the past begins with the question: *How do we know what we know?*

Engaging with primary sources—artifacts, testimonies, photographs, and documents—develops critical inquiry skills, reveals multiple perspectives, and challenges misinformation. These sources not only document events but also capture human responses, emotions, and lived experiences, adding depth to historical understanding.

#### In Practice:

- **Artifacts as Evidence:** Teach students to analyze objects, documents, and images as historical evidence, questioning their origins, purpose, and reliability.
- **Learning by Doing:** Use hands-on experiences—, like artifact analysis, historical photographs, and micro-histories—, to connect students to the past.
- **Testimony Builds Truth:** Incorporate oral histories and firsthand accounts to provide human context and counter historical amnesia.
- **Primary Sources as Conversation Starters:** Use documents and images to prompt discussions about historical events, resilience, and overlooked perspectives.
- **Confronting Prejudice Through Evidence:** Examine primary sources to trace the origins of stereotypes, propaganda, and misinformation.
- **The Human Response to History:** Use letters, newspapers, and local accounts to explore how ordinary people experienced historical events.

#### Caution:

- **Context Matters:** Primary sources are not neutral; students must analyze bias and historical framing.
- **Balancing Emotion with Analysis:** Sensitive materials should be approached with critical thinking, not just emotional reactions.
- **Ethical Storytelling:** Respect voices and experiences when using testimonies or personal artifacts.
- **No Single Source is Definitive:** Encourage comparing multiple sources to build a fuller historical picture.
- **The Passage of Time as a Buffer:** Use historical distance to facilitate discussions on difficult topics.

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### 7. Embrace Complexity and Both/And Thinking

History is not a single, fixed story but a dynamic field shaped by new evidence, multiple perspectives, and contemporary concerns. As David Lowenthal noted, “The past is a foreign country,” meaning we must engage with history on its own terms while recognizing how it informs the present. Teaching students to navigate complexity, competing narratives, and uncertainty fosters critical thinking and historical literacy.

#### In Practice:

- **Competing Narratives:** Teach students to compare differing historical accounts and how they shape modern debates on race, democracy, and identity.
- **Certainty vs. Uncertainty:** Discuss how historical facts range from well-documented to contested, evolving with new discoveries.
- **Connecting Past and Present:** Use historical debates to frame contemporary issues like voting rights, labor movements, and inequality.
- **Media Literacy and Complexity:** Apply historical thinking skills to critically assess misinformation and bias in media.

#### Caution:

- **Avoiding Oversimplification:** Teach students to hold multiple perspectives in tension rather than seeking simple answers. Show how historical narratives evolve with changing political and cultural contexts, and that revising interpretations based on new evidence is a strength, not a weakness.
- **Managing Complexity:** Use tools like timelines and case studies to help students navigate historical nuance.
- **Challenging Nostalgia and Myth-making:** Critically examine selective memory and national myths.