

USC Shoah Foundation

The Institute for Visual History and Education

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USC Shoah Foundation Reveals More Details on its ‘100 Days to Inspire Respect’ Initiative

Los Angeles, Jan. 11, 2017 – At a time of heightened political uncertainty and polarization, middle and high school teachers are in need of easy-to-use resources that encourage their students to grapple with some of the most difficult but important topics: hate, racism, intolerance and xenophobia.

USC Shoah Foundation’s soon-to-launch IWitness initiative, called “100 Days to Inspire Respect,” provides teachers of civics, history, English and other subjects with 100 thought-provoking resources that tackle these challenging topics and more.

Modeled after the aggressive 100-day agenda initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt when he took office in 1933, 100 Days to Inspire Respect will run from Jan. 20 through April 29. During those 100 days, the Education Department at USC Shoah Foundation will release a new IWitness activity, mini lesson or another resource each day based on testimony from the Institute’s Visual History Archive.

Each of the 14 weeks will center on a theme, starting on Jan. 20 with hate, and continuing, in this order: racism; civil and human rights; community; respect; intolerance; women/women’s rights/; immigrant/refugees; cross-cultural understanding; courage; violence and violent extremism; indifference through media; resilience; and civic responsibility.

The shortest activities can be completed in 15 minutes with no teacher prep work required; the longest, a week. The projects will variously have students producing videos, poems, images, and word clouds, as well as developing skills such as comparison-and-contrast analysis and close reading of text. All of the resources are grounded in clips of testimony from survivors of genocide – the logical conclusion of unchecked hatred, racism and intolerance.

“Hatred comes from stories, and so we are countering hatred with stories,” said Kori Street, director of education at USC Shoah Foundation. “If I know your story, if I know who you are, it makes it really hard for me to ‘otherize’ you, be divisive, or hate you.”

The first week will feature an activity that invites teachers to show and discuss a three-minute video called “What is hate?”

The video cites research suggesting hatred has three components: Distancing one’s self from a person or group, such as how Nazis ostracized Jews during World War II; passionate anger or fear, such as how, during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, many Hutus believed their Tutsi neighbors were, quote, “cockroaches” who wanted to overrun their country; and committing to a belief system that dehumanizes a particular group or individual.

The video also touches on modern narratives of hate, such as *immigrants steal our jobs* or *Muslims are terrorists*.

Finally, the video includes a clip of testimony by Holocaust survivor Hedy Epstein, whose remarks exemplify how hatred can take surprising forms. In the clip, Epstein relates how, just after World War II, she and other traumatized survivors and refugees were aboard a train bound for war-ravaged Germany. As the passengers disembarked, they were greeted on the platform by German children begging for food.

When some refugees gave food to some of the children, Epstein – then 21 years old – found herself livid.

“How dare you give something to these Nazis?” she remembers thinking. “Some of these so-called Nazis were five years old, maybe. But ... I was not aware until that moment that I had such anger and such hatred within me.”

Epstein said her across-the-board hatred of Germans eventually vanished.

The clips of testimony embedded in the activities are relatable to all, Street said.

“If someone who has witnessed or experienced the worst of what society throws at us can still see that we have more similarities than differences, then it makes it a lot easier for someone who hasn’t seen the worst to do the same,” she said.

Drawing from testimonies of survivors from not only the Holocaust, but also genocides that occurred in Rwanda, China, Armenia and Guatemala, 100 Days to Inspire Respect will also include activities on xenophobia, multiple perspectives, and the “othering” of certain groups, among others.

IWitness is a free educational website that provides testimony-based learning experiences for students that inspire compassion and critical thinking, leading them to become more thoughtful and active citizens.

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About USC Shoah Foundation

USC Shoah Foundation — The Institute for Visual History and Education is dedicated to making audio-visual interviews with survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust and other genocides, a compelling voice for education and action. The Institute's current collection of more than 54,000 eyewitness testimonies contained within its Visual History Archive preserves history as told by the people who lived it, and lived through it. Housed at the University of Southern California, within the Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, the Institute works with partners around the world to advance scholarship and research, to provide resources and online tools for educators, and to disseminate the testimonies for educational purposes.

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