# DESE logoGenocide Education in Massachusetts: Frequently Asked Questions

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## What should educators know about genocide education in Massachusetts?

In December 2021, Governor Baker signed S. 2557, [*An act concerning genocide education*](https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S2557/BillHistory). This legislation requires that districts provide instruction about the history of genocide to middle and high school students in a way that is aligned to, but not limited to, the content standards laid out in the 2018 Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework. As described in the law, the purpose of genocide instruction is threefold:

* To promote a broader understanding of human rights issues in general
* To examine the patterns of genocide that show how prejudice and hatred impact societies
* To reject group-specific targeting and prejudice that can lead to violence and genocide

The legislation also emphasizes that districts may partner with community-based organizations, including municipal human rights commissions, in developing and implementing genocide education programming, although this type of partnership is not a requirement.

## What does S. 2557 require of teachers and in what grades?

Beginning in the 2022-23 school year, districts are required to incorporate genocide education in **both middle and high school**. As the legislation notes, this instruction should be aligned to, but does not need to be limited to, the content standards in the History and Social Science Framework.

It is important to note that the statute does not:

* Require that genocide education be provided in every grade
* Require that genocide education be provided only in history/social science classes
* Require that genocide education be limited to those examples in the History/Social Science Framework

In both middle and high school, genocide education could also occur in other subject area classes; for example, an English course that studies *The Diary of Anne Frank* or *Night* might incorporate additional instruction and texts about the Holocaust to build deeper knowledge about the Holocaust’s causes and effects.

## How is “genocide” defined? What historical events and developments are classified as genocides?

As defined in S. 2557, genocide is at least one of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group:

* Killing members of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group
* Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group
* Deliberately inflicting conditions of life on a national, ethnic, racial or religious group that are calculated to bring about the physical destruction of the group, in whole or in part
* Imposing measures intended to prevent births within a national, ethnic, racial or religious group
* Forcibly transferring children of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group to another national, ethnic, racial or religious group

Scholars and historians sometimes disagree on how these criteria apply to specific historical events. The content standards in the 2018 History and Social Science Framework include several examples of genocide that are widely understood to meet these criteria, although this list should not be taken to be exclusive:

* Armenian Genocide (WHII.T4.3f)
* Holodomor in Ukraine (WHII.T4.9e)
* Holocaust (USII.T3.2, WHII.T4.13; WHII.T5.7b)
* Cambodian Genocide (WHII.T7.1c)
* Rwandan Genocide (WHII.T7.1d)

## What should genocide education look like in middle and high school?

In **high school**, a number of historical and contemporary genocides are named in the US History II and World History II content standards (see above). Districts should teach students about one or more of these genocides in a meaningful and robust way, deeply engaging students in understanding not only the scale and nature of the atrocities, but their context, causes, and legacies. It may be helpful to leverage a framework like Gregory H. Stanton’s [“10 Stages of Genocide”](https://echoesandreflections.org/prepare/?class=genocide-examining) to ensure that students understand how prejudice, hatred, and bigotry were fomented in society and ultimately gave rise to genocide.

In **middle school**, there are no examples of genocide explicitly listed in the Framework. At these grade levels, Framework-aligned genocide education in history/social studies classes could include:

* Exploring with students some of the **early stages of genocide** to develop their facility identifying and explaining examples of prejudice and group-specific targeting in societies. This might include introducing concepts like classification, symbolization, or discrimination to help lay a foundation for students’ study of genocide in high school.
* Exploring **the role that** **individuals, the government, and/or the media can and have played in** **fostering or challenging group-specific prejudice and hatred**. This could provide an opportunity for students to connect their study of civics in Grade 8 with an understanding of the roots of genocide.
* Studying **examples of modern-day genocides** in regions included in the Grade 6 and 7 World Geography and Cultures content standards; situating them in their geographical, cultural, and historical context; and making connections to other content in the standards as appropriate.
* **Additional genocide related topics or units of study** that engage students in the process of historical inquiry as laid out in the Standards for History/Social Science Practice, at the school or district’s discretion.

## What does it mean for genocide education to be “aligned with the Framework”? What could this look like in practice?

Instruction about the history of genocide should be well-integrated into students’ Framework-aligned coursework. In contrast, limited, isolated instruction like a single lesson on genocide disconnected from the broader unit does not support deeper learning or a meaningful understanding of genocides in their historical context.

The following are some examples of how genocide education could be aligned to different content standards from across grades 6 through 12:

* **Grade 6:** In their study of ancient Israel and Palestine, students learn about the roots of anti-Semitism from both Romans and Christians c. 2000 BCE – 70 CE. They evaluate the differences in belief and practice that led to anti-Semitism as well as the way in which Jews responded and maintained a strong sense of identity in the face of political oppression such as the destruction of the temple by the Romans. *(Content Standards: 6.T3e.2, 6.T3e.3)*
* **Grade 7:** As part of a unit on East Asia, students examine the question *To what extent has the Silk Road’s legacy of religious tolerance persisted today?* They contrast China’s modern-day treatment of the Uighur people, which the US government considers to be a genocide, with religious coexistence on the Silk Road in the early centuries CE. Students look at various primary sources including maps of settlement patterns and oil/gas distribution to help understand why the Chinese government may have an interest in seizing Uighur land. *(Content Standards: 7.T2a.2, 7.T2a.3, 7.T2b.2f)*
* **Grade 8:** In their study of media literacy, students practice critically examining advertisements and propaganda using the “[Key Questions of Media Literacy](https://mediaeducationlab.com/what-media-literacy-0)” from the Media Education Lab. Students examine both print and digital propaganda from a variety of historical and contemporary contexts and analyze the way in which it has been used to foster prejudice and justify oppression of marginalized groups throughout history. *(Content Standards: 8.T7.4, 8.T7.5)*
* **World History II:** Students culminate the year with an independent research project in which they analyze the short- and long-term causes of an example of genocide in the late 20th century. They engage with primary and secondary sources to develop a nuanced explanation of how and why certain groups used difference to foment conflict and share their conclusions in a written essay, then participate in a class seminar in which each student draws on the historical example they studied to synthesize their understanding of the causes of genocide and mass atrocity. *(Content Standards: WHII.T7.1a-j)*
* **United States Government and Politics:** Students engage in an inquiry cycle to answer the question *When and how should the United States intervene to address genocide?[[1]](#footnote-2)* They learn about the different tools of foreign policy and the international agreements that define and protect human rights. They then examine how the United States responded to various 20th-century genocides drawing on government documents, excerpts from newspapers, and personal testimony; ultimately, students develop a policy proposal to respond to a hypothetical example of ethnic conflict based on their historical knowledge and ethical considerations. *(Content Standards: GOV.T3.1, GOV.T3.3, GOV.T3.4, GOV.T3.5, GOV.T3.6)*

## Is there any reporting requirement associated with S. 2557?

While districts are responsible for ensuring that their instruction is aligned to this requirement, there is currently no reporting requirement in place.

## What resources exist to support planning and implementation of genocide education?

Several organizations have well-developed pedagogical guidance and/or instructional resources, including:

* **Choices Program:** The Choices Program at Brown University has [a library of free videos](https://www.choices.edu/video-playlist/?unit=413) (alongside more extensive, for-cost materials) focused on the topic of genocide. Each video includes a scholar answering a question such as “What are human rights?” or “What is the difference between genocide and ethnic cleansing?”
* **Echoes and Reflections:** Echoes and Reflections is a partnership of the Anti-Defamation League, USC Shoah Foundation, and Yad Vashem that focuses on Holocaust education. Their website includes educative resources such as [answers to commonly asked questions from students](https://echoesandreflections.org/students-toughest-questions/), [pedagogical principles](https://echoesandreflections.org/pedagogical-principles/) for effective genocide instruction, and [free online webinars](https://echoesandreflections.org/prepare/?class=webinars) as well as [comprehensive lesson plans](https://echoesandreflections.org/teach/).
* **Facing History and Ourselves:** Facing History and Ourselves situates genocide instruction within the context of individuals’ choices and ethical decision-making. Their [topic page on genocide](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library?f%5B0%5D=teaching_resources_topics%3AGenocide) includes instructional resources – both complete units and collections of sources – covering a number of genocides throughout history.
* **Genocide Education Project:** This organization focuses on instruction about the Armenian Genocide; their website includes [short testimonials from survivors](https://genocideeducation.org/resources/survivor-accounts/) and [a bank of classroom resources](https://genocideeducation.org/resources/teaching-guides/).
* **Genocide Watch:** A product of the Alliance Against Genocide, this website includes resources about [the stages of genocide](https://www.genocidewatch.com/tenstages) as well as “[timestreams](https://www.genocidewatch.com/timestreams),” interactive case studies that allow users to explore examples of historical and modern genocides in depth and include classroom slide decks.
* **New England Holocaust Memorial:** The website of the New England Holocaust Memorial in Boston includes resources for [in-person and virtual tours](https://www.nehm.org/visit/) of the memorial as well as [lesson plans for educators](https://www.nehm.org/learning/educator-resources/) that feature testimony of Holocaust survivors.
* **Upstander Project:** Upstander Project uses storytelling as one way to amplify silenced narratives and challenge systemic injustices. The [Introduction to *Bounty* Teachers Guide](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54f8b4cfe4b0b230c7abfe97/t/63d030e38e0436667c9cf3e3/1674588412301/23-01-05%2BBounty%2BTeacher%27s%2BGuide%2BLesson%2BOne.pdf) includes a detailed lesson plan for introducing and asking students to think critically about the term “genocide.”
* **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:** USHMM’s website has a section devoted to teaching the Holocaust. It includes a “[getting started](https://www.ushmm.org/teach/fundamentals/getting-started-guide-for-teachers)” page with guidelines for educators and foundational teaching resources as well as a more extensive [collection of teaching materials](https://www.ushmm.org/teach/fundamentals/getting-started-guide-for-teachers).
* **USC Shoah Foundation:** The [Educator Resources](https://iwitness.usc.edu/educatorresources) page on USC Shoah’s “iWitness” site includes links to professional development webinars and testimony-based classroom activities to support Holocaust education and cross-cultural instruction more broadly, including coverage of other historical genocides.

**Note:** *Reference in this document to any specific commercial products, processes, or services, or the use of any trade, firm, or corporation name is for the information and convenience of the public, and does not constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Our office is not responsible for and does not in any way guarantee the accuracy of information in other sites accessible through links herein. DESE may supplement this list with other services and products that meet the specified criteria; if you have genocide related-curricular materials you would like to submit for possible inclusion on this list, please contact our office. Note that we are only able to include materials that are free of charge to educators. For more information contact:* *historycivics@doe.mass.edu* *or 781-338-6237.*

1. This example is drawn from the Choices Program’s “[Confronting Genocide](https://www.choices.edu/curriculum-unit/confronting-genocide-never/)” unit. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)