

Good afternoon. My name is Erica Nadelhaft and I am the Education Coordinator at the Holocaust and Human Rights Center of Maine. I worked with Maine teachers to incorporate the state mandate to teach the Holocaust and Genocide into the revised science standards. The process was lengthy, thoughtful, careful, and appropriate.

Science teachers are not being asked to teach a class on the Holocaust. They are being asked, rather, to include discussion of how science has periodically been used to justify and legitimize discrimination and, in extreme cases, genocide. The pseudo-scientific field of eugenics, directly related to the field of genetics, is the most obvious example. It clearly shows how scientific theories can be manipulated and used by countries such as Nazi Germany to not only perpetrate genocide, but to persuade their populations that such genocide is acceptable and even scientifically necessary.

Middle school students are able to grapple with concepts like this. Holocaust education often begins in middle school; for my children, who attended school in northern Aroostook county, discussion of the Holocaust began in fifth grade. At the Holocaust and Human Rights Center we present programs on the Holocaust to middle school students on a regular basis and they are thoughtful, engaged, and absolutely able to have these conversations.

I understand that some are worried that teachers do not have the training and background to incorporate these discussions. Again, science teachers are not being asked to teach a history of the Holocaust; they are being asked to look at how science has been used by those seeking to commit genocide against others. The Maine Department of Education will also be providing professional development and training for teachers in this area.

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