

# NOTES FOR EDUCATORS



Visiting Places of Learning  
and Remembrance

## AUTHENTIC SITES?

Places of learning and remembrance relating to Nazi forced labour are located at various kinds of historical sites. Some are located at former concentration camps, while others are at the sites of former detention centres or associated with the organisation of forced labour and its perpetrators. However, none of these sites are as they were during the Nazi era. A mixture of chance, historical and political factors, and societal perspectives have shaped their appearance today. This is why history can be neither “experienced” nor “felt” at these places. Instead, there are traces of Nazi persecution that need to be approached, analysed and contextualised. Exhibitions, guided tours or workshops can help in this process.

## EMOTIONS

Visiting a place of learning and remembrance relating to Nazi forced labour can evoke emotions: these are places where crimes often took place. These emotions should be given space. It is okay if individuals want to avoid visiting parts of the site or need a break. It is just as okay if people are not or do not appear to be emotionally moved. There is no “correct” behaviour in these places. Educational and emotional processes are complex and lengthy. A visit to a place of learning and remembrance can provide an impetus for further engagement with the topic, and may only have an effect much later.

## NOT WANTING TOO MUCH

Refrain from overloading your visit to a place of learning and remembrance with expectations of what can be learned or conveyed there. Don't expect a visit to “reform” positions that you perceive as problematic.

## EXTRACURRICULAR SITE

Students should be able to organise their visit in a way that is as self-determined and interest-driven as possible. They and their engagement with the site and its history should be at the centre of the visit. The fewer expectations you communicate, the more freely they can interact with the site. Avoid quizzing students about the visit or giving them marks. People come to places of remembrance with very different levels of prior knowledge. Questions that seem to indicate a lack of knowledge often lead to more precise conversations or raise unexpected questions. There are no “stupid” questions.

## PERSPECTIVES AND OPINIONS

The perspectives of the people who visit these places are different. Some students may have experiences of racism or family histories related to the sites that differ from the perspectives of the majority society or the descendants of the perpetrators. Be aware of this without addressing individuals as representatives of a particular group.

The history of the places means that they cannot be “neutral” places. Historical-political education at places of learning and remembrance always clearly opposes racism, antisemitism and other forms of discrimination and stands by those who have been negatively affected by them.

## YOUR ROLE

During your visit, the majority of educational and relationship-building activities will take place between students and staff. Therefore, you can take a back seat and allow experts, who are the guides at the places of remembrance, to lead the way. They are highly knowledgeable about the place and have extensive experience to share.

## THE FRAMEWORK

When planning a visit to a place of learning and remembrance, it is essential to allocate sufficient time. The longer the duration, the more beneficial the experience will be. Most places of learning offer introductory tours to provide an overview of the place but also workshops that delve deeper into specific topics. These workshops can span over several days. If possible, plan a lesson for preparation and follow-up. You can find advice on structuring these lessons on the Education Platform. It's essential to be open with students early on regarding the place they will be visiting and explain the visit's purpose to avoid surprises.

It's a good practice to talk to the institution beforehand. This way, your guide can prepare and adapt the program to better suit your needs.

## LINKS WITH THE SUBJECT OF NAZI FORCED LABOUR IN THE CLASSROOM

Forced labour was one of the central crime complexes in the Nazi system. Discussion of many different aspects of the history of the Nazi era can be opened up, taking the subject of Nazi forced labour as a starting point. These may include

- the racist structure of Nazi society
- the course and characteristic features of the Second World War
- history of Nazi Germany as global or European history
- scope for action for German society
- how the history of the Nazi era has been dealt with in East and West Germany since 1945
  - discussion, legal, academic and social reappraisal and prosecution (or lack of it), questions of compensation and reparations
- culture of remembrance
- ...

Nazi forced labour can also be discussed in terms of areas of questioning including

- the history of racism
- the history of labour migration
- global labour distribution
- fair labour
- economic history
- ethical questions of guilt and responsibility
- ...