

Tips for Discussing Nazism in a Developmentally Appropriate Way for Elementary Students

A Companion to the “No to Nazis in Connecticut” Inquiry Activity

“Elementary school can be an ideal place to begin discussing the value of diversity and the danger of bias and prejudice. These critical themes can be addressed through local and national historical events and can be reinforced during later study of the Holocaust.”

From the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum “Fundamentals of Teaching the Holocaust”

Many elementary-aged students’ specific background knowledge about Hitler, Nazis, Germany, and the time period around 1937 may be limited. This language guide is intended to support students’ understanding of the concepts and content of this inquiry in a developmentally appropriate manner.

Participating in this inquiry together will foster critical consciousness as students consider a local historical example of the principles of democracy and social justice in action. To that end, you may like to share some or all of the following:

- In our class/school, we believe that diversity makes us stronger and more beautiful as a community. Diversity simply means the presence of difference in a place or group. These differences might be in a person’s religion, race, gender, ethnicity, social class, age, immigration status, and more. We believe all aspects of diversity are important and welcome in our community.
- Not everyone in the world feels that our diversity as humans makes us beautiful and stronger as communities. Not everyone in the past believed that, either. In the past, some people were treated in unfair and harmful ways because they were seen as “different” by people in power. This still happens today.
- We will be making discoveries together about real events that happened here in Connecticut in the year 1937. In 1937, much was going on in the world. In Germany (a country in Europe) a man named Adolf Hitler was in power. He and his followers were called Nazis, and their ideas led them to do terrible things. They did not believe all people are equal. They believed that people like them were superior to (or better than) everyone else and that only they belonged in German society. They treated people unfairly based on their religion (especially people who were Jewish), skin color, whether or not someone had a disability, and more, and they were responsible for the deaths of millions of innocent people.
- Here in the United States, Adolf Hitler and the Nazis were not in power, but there were people here who agreed with Hitler and the Nazis’ hateful ideas. In fact, there were even people in Connecticut who tried to spread this hate.
- Let’s dig into this history together and see how it can help us understand the danger of **bias** (a preference either for or against an individual or group that affects fair judgment) and **prejudice** (judging or forming an idea about someone or a group of people before you actually know them.) Also, let’s find inspiration in studying this Connecticut story, because it shows us an example for how all people, even children, can take action against bias and prejudice.