

Introduction

Facing History and Ourselves is devoted to teaching about the dangers of indifference and the values of civility by helping schools confront the complexities of history in ways that promote critical and creative thinking about the challenges we face and the opportunities we have for positive change. Facing History is unique in that it is not a program of one-week seminars that are all-too-easily forgotten, a packaged curriculum, or a prescribed set of lessons. Rather, it offers dynamic, long-term intervention. It is designed to have a lasting effect on the life of a school.

THE FACING HISTORY APPROACH

With the help of the Facing History staff and resource speakers, teachers who participate in the program learn to use the tools of the humanities – inquiry, analysis, and interpretation – to supplement or enrich existing courses. At workshops and follow-up sessions, those teachers are offered materials that engage and challenge their students’ most advanced thinking and promote individual reflection and group discussion.

Adolescence is a time when many young people struggle with issues of independence, trust, freedom, and responsibility. It is also a time when life centers around peer groups and mutual relationships. The readings and films recommended by Facing History support and challenge students in their efforts to define their own identity and their relationship to society as a whole. Thus many of those materials promote an understanding of differing perspectives, competing truths, and the need to comprehend not only one’s own motives but also those of others. By offering a framework for examining issues students regard as important, Facing History helps them find meaning in their education and empowers them to make positive changes in their lives.

Adolescence is a time of major developmental transitions. Students need to think about their thinking in order to become aware of their moral development. As a student explained, “One thing this course has done, it has made me more aware – not only of what happened in the past but also of what is happening today, now, in the world and in me.” Facing History seeks to foster cognitive growth and historical understanding through a content and methodology that induces conflict and continually complicates students’ simple answers to complex questions. The readings and activities included in the Resource Book, the recommended videos, and the guest speakers encourage students to view the world from more than one perspective, to place themselves in someone else’s shoes, and to express their ideas freely. They are stimulated to think about the choices they have as individuals within a society and the consequences of those decisions.

At a time when many are urging that students learn to think critically without paying much attention to what those students are to think about, Facing History stresses compelling content. This is not a program that is mired in relativism. Facing History has a strong bias. It is committed to content that furthers democratic values and beliefs. It is also committed to prevention. We believe that unexamined prejudices, myths, and misinformation are threatening the nation and its future. The violence in our streets is but one sign of the danger. We therefore must teach our students to look, listen, read, and think critically. And they must be constantly challenged to complicate their thinking by not accepting simple solutions to complex questions. Many of the readings and films used in Facing History courses were deliberately selected with that aim in mind. Some focus on the choices open to various individuals. Others draw attention to aspects of society or human behavior that affect the kinds of decisions groups and even nations make. Each reading helps students realize that “life is almost always more complicated than we think. Behind the gleaming ranks of those who seem totalitarian robots stand men and women, various and diverse, complex and complicated, some brave, some cowardly, some brainwashed, some violently idiosyncratic, and all of them very human.”

As students engage in thinking about thinking, they develop a vocabulary of decision-making and justice as aids to their reasoning. And as they grapple with the range of choices individuals actually had in the decades before the Nazis took power, many find it harder and harder to defend simple explanations of why democracy failed in Germany. They also begin to see critical connections between past and present. And they begin to wonder. As a Facing History student from South Africa wrote in her journal, “We learnt lessons that cannot be found in any textbook. The discussions and stories held me spellbound. Now my mind is like a probing satellite and I can ask more than ‘who, how many and where.’ I can ask ‘why and how could.’” In time she may also begin to raise questions of “should and would.”

The fundamental concerns of Facing History and Ourselves figure prominently in the works of Hannah Arendt. She has traced her own impulse to think about thinking to the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi official in charge of the deportation and extermination of Jews. She expected the trial to reveal that he acted out of ideological conviction, evil motives, or stupidity. Instead she concluded that he never gave much thought to what he did. Indeed, he was protected from thinking by routines, clichés, and the constant pressure to conform. Arendt therefore wondered, “Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining... be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even condition them against it?”

In the end, Arendt decided that even though the activity of thinking breaks down preconceived ideas, thinking in and of itself does not lead to action. In her view, informed judgment is the bridge between thought and action. Thus, she did not consider judgment the mechanical process of

applying a rule or law to a particular case but rather an art that can be carried out only within the realm of choice.

The writings of Jacob Bronowski have also influenced Facing History’s approach to the process of thinking, judging, and ultimately taking action. “There is no way of exchanging information that does not demand an act of judgment,” he wrote. “All knowledge, all information between human beings can only be exchanged within a play of tolerance. And that is true whether the exchange is in science, or in literature, or in religion, or in politics, or even in any form of thought that aspires to dogma.” For Bronowski, the ability to tolerate divergent views is what distinguishes humans from all other creatures.

The Facing History program incorporates both Arendt’s ideas and Bronowski’s by offering students a variety of perspectives and helping them sift through differing, and at times conflicting, points of view before asking them to make wise judgments. It is, writes one high school teacher, a program that “honors duality; process and product, head and heart, history and ethics.”

The importance of pushing students to form judgments was brought to light by the research Betty Bardige conducted for the thesis she wrote under the direction of Professor Carol Gilligan. Bardige discovered that unless students are encouraged to make moral judgments, they are likely to become paralyzed by their own thinking and therefore unable to respond to injustice. She maintains that it is essential that students examine the consequences of actions as well as analyze the causes.

Facing History and Ourselves does both. It helps teachers move their students from thought to judgment and ultimately to participation. Through that process, students and their teachers build a community of thinkers. As Hannah Arendt once observed, the activity of thinking is a solitary endeavor – a dialogue with oneself in order to formulate moral principles. Judgment, however, requires dialogue with others. Arendt stressed the importance of that discourse.

The world is not humane because it is made by human beings, and it does not become humane just because the human voice sounds in it, but only when it has become the object of discourse. However much we are affected by the things of the world, however deeply they may stir and stimulate us, they become human for us only when we can discuss them with our fellows... We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human.

In a Facing History classroom, teachers and students chronicle their learning in journals. They use their journals to reflect on who they are and to re-examine their goals, values, and beliefs. Only then do they come together to share insights and responses to complex questions. That sharing requires trust and mutual respect. Building that kind of classroom community is hard work and requires a new relationship between students and

teacher. Many teachers make contracts with their students to underscore the importance of that new relationship. One teacher wrote:

I told the students that the curriculum touches on a great many things that could hurt us all if we were not sensitive to one another's feelings. I stated that I was uncomfortable teaching the unit unless we could maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect. The contract included that each person could express his or her feelings without being put down by others.

The materials provided in this Resource Book are designed to stimulate and inform that interaction by reinforcing the idea that learning is a collaborative endeavor that benefits every participant. It guides both the teacher and the student. Thus Facing History seeks to:

- develop an educational model that helps students move from thought to judgment to participation as they confront the moral questions inherent in a study of violence, racism, antisemitism, and bigotry;
- reveal the universal connections of history through a rigorous examination of a particular history;
- further a commitment to adolescents as the moral philosophers of our society and help them build a “civil society” through an understanding that turning neighbor against neighbor leads to violence.

Educators learn the Facing History approach by experiencing it in workshops, retreats, and institutes, where they encounter scholars who challenge their thinking not only about ethics and history but also about the process of teaching. As one administrator has noted “the material is so powerful and so significant that it calls to question why we teach and how we teach. It calls for mastery of teaching skills, learning how to pose the significant questions and how to complicate the thinking of those who would be content with simple solutions.”

The Facing History staff helps educators acquire those skills as they explore the opportunities new approaches can provide to challenge students and stimulate their thinking. Later teachers meet individually with a Facing History program associate to design a Facing History course that meets their students' needs and the needs of their particular school.

Teachers who participate in Facing History programs have access not only to the program staff and resource speakers but also to the Facing History Resource Center, a lending library of relevant videos and films, books, slides, tape recordings, posters, and articles on a broad range of topics. They also receive newsletters, invitations to Facing History conferences, and an opportunity to join a community of teachers in their region who meet regularly to continue learning. In addition, Facing History offers adult education programs and community-wide events that help link the work of Facing History to the larger community.

For nearly two decades, Facing History and Ourselves has been documenting the effectiveness of these efforts. Reports of those evaluations, which are available from the Facing History Resource Center, show that the program is achieving its goals. Students are indeed capable of handling a rigorous course that demands their best thinking. And they are able to make connections between the past and their own lives. And although each student seems to feel the impact in a slightly different way, few participants are able to avoid comparisons with issues close to home; any discussion of prejudice, discrimination, or violence almost invariably draws parallels to similar problems in the students' own schools and neighborhoods. Henry Zabierek, the director of social studies in Brookline at the time Facing History was founded summarized the program in this way:

This curriculum is about more than the Holocaust. It's about the reading and the writing and the arithmetic of genocide, but it's also about such R's as rethinking, reflecting, and reasoning. It's about prejudice, discrimination and scapegoating; but it's also about human dignity, morality, law, and citizenship. It's about avoiding and forgetting, but it's also about civic courage and justice. In an age of "back to basics" this curriculum declares that there is one thing more basic, more sacred, than any of the three R's; namely, the sanctity of human life.

In all probability, Facing History will not end prejudice, discrimination, scapegoating, or even fights on the playground. Nevertheless, program evaluations demonstrate that students and teachers in a Facing History program have heightened awareness of the causes and consequences of those issues. In some cases, the impact has been subtle, with students observing that they have begun to think differently about stereotypes and racial slurs. As one student explained, "This unit showed me that as a young black man my race is not the only race that has suffered... We are all simply human beings... This course made me look inside myself. I for one know that I have felt prejudice toward someone of some other group. These things are all a part of being a human being, but cooperation, peace and love are ingredients also." Achieving that degree of awareness is a meaningful objective for many students.

In other instances, participants in the program have shown more dramatic changes. A young Chicagoan who found the courage to leave his gang said of the program, "Facing History showed me that there are people, teachers and other students concerned about teenagers' well-being in this world of violence. Facing History showed me that yes, people do know we have problems growing up in today's society and no, we are not turning our backs on it."

In another community, a school recently reported the way its students responded when teachers discovered that someone had written "KKK" and "Nigger go home" on the washroom walls. When those students were confronted with what had happened, the room was silent for a moment

and then a white student turned to a black classmate and said, “Valita, I’m sorry that’s written on the walls; it’s no different than what we’ve been studying. This is how it begins. I’m going to go and take it off, and anyone who wants to join me, can.” One by one, students rose and followed her to the washroom where they erased the graffiti.

Parents have also observed measurable differences. One parent wrote, “In no other course was [my daughter] exposed to real dilemmas as complex and challenging. In no other course has she been inspired to use the whole of her spiritual, moral, and intellectual resources to solve a problem. In no other course has she been so sure that the task mattered seriously for her development as a responsible person.”

Just as many students find that the program has altered their perceptions and compelled them to think more about their behaviors, many teachers find that it has changed not only the way they teach but also the way they think. Ron Gwiazda, the assistant to the headmaster of Boston Latin School, described that process when he spoke of the impact the program had on one of his students.

Bedelia is an excellent student, runs 400 meters in under 60 seconds, has a radiant smile, and is one of the most sweet and gentle human beings I know. We like each other very much, but when Bedelia thinks through the complex issues of race and violence and writes in her journal “we,” I realize that I’m not part of that “we.” And I don’t have simple answers to the conflicting emotions that she feels, nor to this invisible but present distance that arises in that “we.”

What I can offer Bedelia, because of Facing History and Ourselves, is ways of thinking about complex issues and ways of coming to know herself and me better, which is essentially the core of Facing History and Ourselves. What Facing History and Ourselves does so well is to avoid substituting one set of simple solutions, one polemic, one propaganda, for another. Instead it aims to teach teachers to teach young people to think critically and independently, to know the past as fact and to confront its implications in ways that make us all seek to change the future for the better. If there are no simple answers to the hatred and violence from the past or in the present, there are the countering forces of intellectual honesty, integrity, justice, and empathy.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE RESOURCE BOOK

This new edition of the Facing History Resource Book is similar to the previous one in many respects. Like the earlier edition, it is not a textbook – a series of discreet lessons with goals and objectives. Rather, it provides students and teachers with a meaningful but flexible structure for examining complex events and ideas. It also fosters original and thoughtful responses by encouraging students to reflect on difficult questions and issues. The new edition, like the earlier one, helps students make connections between historical events and their own lives. And it too can be used not only in social studies classes but also in combination with English, art, and science classes.

There are differences between the two editions. The “Using” section that followed readings in the earlier edition are now known as “Connections.” Films and key quotations no longer appear as readings. Films are now referenced in Connections along with suggestions for their use in the classroom. Key quotations appear as sidebars. And the new book, unlike the earlier one, contains a detailed table of contents, an index of audio-visual resources, and an index.

The readings in the new edition are somewhat longer and provide more context. Many were selected to help students better understand the links between the past and their own lives today. The new edition also contains more social history and reflects the insights of current scholarship, particularly scholarship on issues related to violence and racism. Two important chapters in the earlier edition have been deleted and their content added to other chapters. As a result, anti-Judaism and antisemitism are discussed within the context of particular eras rather than in an isolated chapter. The same is true of the Armenian Genocide. It too has been placed within a chronological framework.

The new edition is cross-referenced to two other Facing History publications: *Elements of Time* and *Choosing to Participate*. *Elements of Time* is a companion manual to the Facing History videotape collection of Holocaust testimonies – the result of a five-year collaborative project between Facing History and the Fortunoff Video Archive at Yale University made possible through the vision and support of Eli Evans and the Charles H. Revson Foundation. The book includes transcriptions of the videos along with essays and readings from some of the many scholars and resource speakers who have addressed Facing History conferences. *Choosing to Participate* is an outgrowth of the last chapter of the Resource Book. It addresses students’ questions about how they can make a difference by introducing them to traditions of care and models for participation in American democracy. The book provides a history of the voluntary sector and traces the way individuals and groups have used the First Amendment to the Constitution as avenues of outrage and advocacy.

AN OVERVIEW

The first two chapters in the Resource Book use literature to introduce the key concepts developed in Facing History. Those ideas are then applied to real individuals and real events in history. The opening chapters engage students in thinking about behavior and introduce them to the principles of decision-making. They also help students build a vocabulary of morality. In Chapter 1, for example, students explore the connections between individuals and the society in which they live. And they discover why Martha Minow argues that “when we identify one thing as like the others, we are not merely classifying the world; we are investing particular classifications with consequences and positioning ourselves in relation to those meanings. When we identify one thing as unlike the others, we are dividing the world; we use our language to exclude, to distinguish – to discriminate.”

Chapter 1 also begins an exploration of many of the central questions developed in the program:

- How is our identity formed?
- How do our attitudes and beliefs influence our thinking? How does our thinking affect our actions?
- How can we keep our individuality and still be a part of a group?
- How does our tendency to see us as unique but them as members affect our behavior as well as our attitudes?

Chapter 2 then outlines the ways various nations, including the United States, have defined their identity. And it helps students understand the significance of those definitions. After all, those who define a nation’s identity determine who is a part of its “universe of obligation.” Early in the chapter, the focus is on the United States and the way three sets of ideas shaped those definitions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: *democracy*, *race*, and *nationalism*. All three concepts have had tremendous appeal to people all over the world. And all three, when carried to an extreme, have been abused. False ideas about “race” have on occasion turned nationalism into ethnocentrism and chauvinism. At the same time, some democrats have confused equality with conformity. Others have viewed differences as proof that “they” are less human than “we” are.

The next few chapters focus primarily on the decisions that resulted in the Holocaust and relate those decisions to issues important to students’ lives today – particularly to issues of racism, antisemitism, violence, conformity, and power. Chapter 3, which marks the beginning of the case study, examines the choices people in Europe and the United States made after World War I. The chapter highlights German efforts to build a lasting democracy after the humiliation of defeat and explores the values, myths, and fears that threatened those efforts. Chapters 4 through 8 examine how the Nazis turned Germany into a totalitarian state by turning neighbor against neighbor in order to break the moral backbone of a citizenry and

why the German people allowed them to do so. Students also consider the way individuals and nations defined their “universe of obligation” in the 1930s and 1940s and the consequences of those definitions. It is in these chapters that students begin to wonder, “What might I have done?” And it is in these chapters that students see connections to their own world and come to understand why Cynthia Ozick warns that “when a whole population takes on the status of bystander, the victims are without allies; the criminals, unchecked, are strengthened; and only then do we need to speak of heroes. When a field is filled from end to end with sheep, a stag stands out. When a continent is filled from end to end with the compliant, we learn what heroism is.”

As they read these chapters, some teachers and students emphasize the acts of courage that rekindle hope in humanity. But, to study only heroes and speak solely of human dignity is to distort and distract from the painful reality of this history. Thinking about the victims and perpetrators of mass murder requires a new “vocabulary of annihilation.” The “choiceless choices” of this history of human behavior in extremity do not reflect options between right and wrong but between one form of abnormal response and other.

In the last three chapters, students move from thought to judgment, and then to action. As students think about judgment in moral and legal terms, they consider such questions as:

- What is the difference between crimes against humanity and killings sanctioned by war?
- What is the purpose of a trial? Is it to punish evil-doing or set a precedent for the future?
- Are individuals responsible for their crimes if they have obeyed the laws of their nation? Or are there higher laws?
- How does one determine punishment? Is everyone equally guilty? Or do some bear more responsibility than others? Can an entire nation be guilty?

Chapters 10 and 11 consider issues related to prevention by returning to themes developed in the first two chapters in the book. Chapter 10 explores how we remember the past and considers the ways those memories shape the present. It also focuses on the ways individuals and nations avoid, revise, deny, or rewrite their history. In the words of journalist Judith Miller, “Knowing and remembering the evil in history and in each of us might not prevent a recurrence of genocide. But ignorance of history or the suppression of memory removes the surest defense we have, however inadequate, against such gigantic cruelty and indifference to it.” What then fosters memory? For Miller, it is anything that makes the past more real and encourages empathy and caring. As part of this chapter, students examine the way we memorialize the past through monuments, museums, and schooling.

Chapter 11 further develops the idea of prevention by considering what it takes to be a good citizen. The chapter is organized around the idea that “people become brave by doing brave acts. People become compassionate by doing compassionate acts. People become good citizens by engaging in acts of good citizenship.” Many of the individuals highlighted in Chapter 11 help us understand what it takes to keep democracy alive. The chapter also promotes participation through acts of community service.

STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

Each chapter in the Resource Book has a similar structure. Each begins with an overview that outlines key concepts and themes. The readings that follow allow students to explore those concepts and themes in greater depth. Many are primary sources that capture the ideas, assumptions, and observations of those living through a particular age in history. As Jacob Bronowski once wrote, those sources help us “draw conclusions from what we see to what we do not see” and “recognize ourselves in the past, on the steps to the present.” Teachers are encouraged to select the ones that match their objectives and the needs and interests of their students. Readings that develop important concepts are identified in the sidebars and should not be omitted.

At the end of each reading, students encounter a number of activities, quotations, and questions grouped under the heading, “Connections.” These are designed to build curiosity, develop habits of inquiry, promote critical thinking, encourage research, and foster an understanding of the relationship between various ideas and concepts. Many ask students to make inferences or think about attitudes and consequences. Others provide practice in expressing ideas orally, visually, or in writing.

Some activities are set off with a special symbol →. These activities refer to videos, books, and other materials available from the Facing History Resource Center. These materials can be used in place of a reading or along with it. A number of these materials present ideas critical to the program and suggestions for using them are provided.

The activities provided in the Connections are only a starting point for helping students confront the past and themselves. Teachers should always select the activities that relate the history most directly to the lives of their particular students and add new questions and activities as appropriate.