

# USC Shoah Foundation

The Institute for Visual History and Education

29 September 2020

Instructional Quality Commission  
c/o California Department of Education  
Curriculum Frameworks & Instructional Resources Division  
1430 N Street, Suite 3207  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum – ESMC Second Field Review

On behalf of USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education, I thank you for the work you have done to integrate ethnic studies in the California student curriculum. It is hard work and we recognize that. However, I write to share our belief that the curriculum falls far short of its potential, and may even have the opposite of its intended effect.

We at USC Shoah Foundation have been working tirelessly on the problem of hate (and its many manifestations) around the world. Grounding this work in the audiovisual testimonies of survivors and witnesses of genocide has helped to illuminate our work in the many diverse environments in which we work and we offer our support as you seek to revise the ESMC.

Below we outline the ways in which we believe the draft curriculum could be strengthened:

1. Antisemitic, anti-Israel or anti-Zionist content, whether express or implied, cannot be allowed within the ESMC.
2. Specific safeguards against the teaching of antisemitic and anti-Israel material should be added through modification of the ESMC guidelines. Other safeguards around standards of teaching should be included as was done with the amendments to AB 331.
3. Include explicit instruction on antisemitism as a form of hate in the curriculum.
  - a. Addressing racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia without recognizing Jews and antisemitism serves to render antisemitism as an unrelated issue in the fight for justice. This omission woefully ignores students' experiences and reflects the seriously and deeply flawed approach of the curriculum which may end up disempowering large numbers of students— exactly what the curriculum aims to counter in the first place.
  - b. The existential threat of antisemitism must not be ignored. Antisemitism was the root cause of the genocide of the Jews—6 million were murdered during the Holocaust—and antisemitism continues to fuel hate and murderous violence in California. In fact, as you well know, California has more hate groups than any other state.
4. Include sample lessons and resources that highlight the use of audiovisual testimony of Jewish survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust and other genocides who can illuminate nuanced understandings of constructs in the study of difference, an essential dimension of ethnic studies. The model curriculum should include sample lesson plans that teach about the Jewish American experience, including content on the diversity of the Jewish community in California as reflected by the large number of Jews of Color and Jews from the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. They can shed light on:
  - a. Manifestations and impact of hate
  - b. Understanding the dynamics of oppression, privilege, ethnicity and power: from the individual level to institutional level

- c. Stories about the experiences of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust in California, from resettling after the war to stories of citizenship that examine hate, racism and antisemitism
  - d. Testimony resources include case studies of people – Jews, African Americans, Asian Americans and others – navigating identity and racism in the context of their ethnicity in everyday life, giving students insight into their own choices.
5. Interconnect the ESMC with the California Department of Education’s Model Curriculum for Human Rights and Genocide (2000), which deals extensively with antisemitism and the Holocaust. Bridging the two curricula makes explicit the connection between bigotry and discrimination based on ethnicity and the violent hatred that is at the root of genocide.

Nearly 1.2 million Jewish Americans call California home. Acts of hate and violence against them continue over generations and have spiked in recent years. To not even recognize this ethnic group and the threats it faces within the ESMC framework sullies the entire project and disserves California students. If the California Department of Education and the State of California wish to advance inclusion and equity effectively and fairly, including Jewish Americans within the ESMC is required. Please accept the attachment to this letter which includes specific recommendations for inclusion in Appendix C of the Model Curriculum.

Thank you for your continued leadership. We are available to support your efforts in the development of such an important part of the curriculum for California students. I can be contacted at [crwiedem@usc.edu](mailto:crwiedem@usc.edu) or 510-590-8330.

Kind regards,



Claudia R. Wiedeman, PhD  
Director of Education

Attachment

## Attachment

### Suggested Lesson Resources for Inclusion in California Department of Education Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Second Field Review Draft / September 2020)

#### Sample Safe Spaces and Community Building Activities

##### **IWitness Activities, Resources and Immersive Experiences**

IWitness is a free educational website where educators can access multimedia activities, resources and immersive experiences grounded in audiovisual testimony from survivors and witnesses of genocide. Guided by its research-based pedagogy of the 4 C's, IWitness compliments the ethnic studies curriculum by offering students first-person testimony that can help illuminate understandings of race/ethnicity and related topics from across the model curriculum. All content is easily accessible online/offline, standards-aligned and flexible. Students are invited in to IWitness via their teacher. Professional development is available throughout the academic year and all is accessible at no-cost at **iwitness.usc.edu**. Below are sample IWitness activities for promoting safe spaces and community building:

- My Story Matters: Power of Story  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=2368>
- Where I'm From - Reflections on Identity  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=3779>
- Cross-Cultural Exchange  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=2535&retainFilter=true>
- Cross-Cultural Understanding  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=2508&retainFilter=true>
- Language & Acculturation  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=2519&retainFilter=true>

##### **IWitness Mindful Explorations (Social-Emotional Learning Skills-Building)**

Mindful Explorations are short daily activities that promote social-emotional learning skills using carefully curated clips of audiovisual testimony from survivors and witnesses of genocide. Using testimony as grounding, students reflect on the challenges they may face in their lives, develop relevant social-emotional capacities to address those challenges and identify how they could apply those capacities to overcome them. Each lesson includes guiding questions, three 10-minute activities and curated clips of audiovisual testimony. All materials are downloadable and accessible at no-cost at **iwitness.usc.edu**.

- Belonging- Shared Interests  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=4976&retainFilter=true>
- Belonging - Validation  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=4975&retainFilter=true>
- Belonging - Offering and Accepting Help  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=4977&retainFilter=true>
- Belonging- Taking Action

## **Critical Conversations Resources**

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- Racism: "Us vs. Them"  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=2417>
- Representation & the Power of Words  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=2398>
- Contemporary Antisemitism (this activity developed in partnership with ADL, Yad Vashem for Echoes and Reflections)  
<https://echoesandreflections.org/unit-11/?state=open#content>

## **Resources for Connecting Ethnic Studies to Local Demographics**

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- Analyzing Informational Text Featuring the Story of Dolores Huerta  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/SFI/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=2437&retainFilter=true>
- Boyle Heights: Continuity and Change  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=2528&retainFilter=true>
- Finding Your Seat on the Bus  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/SFI/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=1484>
- 1936 Olympics: Race, Politics & Civil Rights  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=292>
- What's Going On?  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=2927&retainFilter=true>
- Additional IWitness activities on a range of related topics can be found here:  
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Sites/100days/>

## Digital Resources

USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education makes available a number of testimony-based digital resources that could be used to explore the ethnic studies curriculum. These resources are grounded in the context of testimony from survivors and witnesses of genocide and mass atrocity, including witnesses from the core groups addressed in the ethnic studies model curriculum.

Using our research-based pedagogy of the 4 C's, we invite students to hone their skills and develop new insight on their own experiences in innovative ways that also promote digital skills, information literacy skills and media literacy skills. Below are a number of resources that could be used as tools within the ethnic studies curriculum (and across the wider curriculum).

- **IWitness** – a free website from USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education. Provides over 350 online/offline activities and resources:
  - 21 languages (e.g. Spanish, German, Hungarian, Polish)
  - Search tool for exploring over 4000K interviews with survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust and other genocides and mass atrocities in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.
  - Interviews include those with African American and Asian American men who were involved in the liberation of Jewish men, women and children during the Holocaust. These interviews shed nuanced light on the question of identity, race/ethnicity, belonging and what it means to be American.
  - The built in-search tool could be used to explore topics in the ethnic studies curriculum that may intersect with historical processes inherent in the persecution of Jews before, during and after the Holocaust, allowing students access to a broad lens and opportunities for deepening their understanding within the ethnic studies curriculum.
  - Available here: <https://iwatch.usc.edu/sfi/>
- **Dimensions in Testimony Interactive Biographies** – these biographies enable people to ask questions that prompt real-time responses from pre-recorded video interviews with Holocaust survivors and other witnesses to genocide. The pioneering project integrates advanced filming techniques, specialized display technologies and next generation natural language processing to create an interactive biography.
  - Students learning about ethnic studies could ask the DiT interactive biographies about topics related to race/ethnicity and nation from these biographies at the pace and freedom to construct their own path to learning.
  - these biographies will be available in IWitness in late fall 2020 for students to interact with and learn from. See information here: <https://sfi.usc.edu/dit>
  - These biographies will be integrated within IWitness activities for easy access and use.
- **Virtual Reality Film: Lala** – In this 360° VR blend of animation and live-action video, Holocaust survivor Roman Kent shares the story of his time in Nazi-occupied Poland with his beloved dog, Lala, who taught him a timeless lesson: "love is stronger than hate."
  - A pre-activity is available for students to complete in preparation for watching the film, [Lala/Reflections on Prejudice](#). Additional resources including clips, links and other resources available here: <https://iwatch.usc.edu/sfi/sites/360/>
  - In the context of the Ethnic Studies Curriculum, this film could be used to explore topics like the process of dehumanization based of ethnicity (in this case, Jewish ethnicity) or themes around resilience and resistance against persecution.