

# Instructional Review Tool

The Instructional Review Tool supports educators, instructional leaders and coaches in fostering high-quality teaching and learning on standards related to ethnic studies, the Holocaust and other genocides. These topics require thoughtful approaches that examine complex historical events, systemic inequities and social issues while honoring diverse perspectives. This tool emphasizes culturally responsive teaching, critical thinking, authentic narratives, and Transformative Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) to connect history to the present and deepen students' understanding of justice, human rights and democratic principles. By promoting high-quality instruction of these essential topics, the tool helps students develop civic knowledge, strengthen democratic institutions and take informed action to prevent oppression and advance human dignity.

## Using the Tool

This tool provides structured questions and criteria for observing and reflecting on classroom instruction, with a focus on what teachers and students are actively doing during the lesson. It offers a list of student behaviors and teacher practices to look for during instruction. The tool is versatile and can be used for focused observations to refine specific teaching practices, comprehensive reviews to assess overall instruction and collaborative learning within professional learning communities (PLCs). You can use the checkboxes to keep track of key aspects of student learning and teacher practices, document your observations in real-time and reflect on patterns and areas for growth.

## Six Noticing Tools

The Instructional Review Tool is organized into **six key areas** that highlight essential elements of high-quality teaching and learning on standards related to ethnic studies, the Holocaust and other genocides.

Click on each key area to find question sets to use as Noticing Tools for each key area. They can be used individually—to focus on a specific area of instruction—or in combination.



### Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Practices

**Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Practices** ensures that teaching honors diverse identities and experiences by including historically underrepresented voices and fostering an environment where all students feel valued and respected.



### Historical Thinking and Analysis

**Historical Thinking and Analysis** develops students' ability to critically examine causes, consequences and perspectives of historical events, helping them evaluate constructed narratives and understand their lasting impact.



### Critical Thinking and Inquiry-driven Learning

**Critical Thinking and Inquiry-driven Learning** encourages students to question the use of power, analyze persistent disparities and develop evidence-based solutions, fostering active engagement with complex historical and contemporary issues.



### Historical Knowledge and Global Awareness

**Historical Knowledge and Global Awareness** helps students connect local histories to national and global contexts, examining how events reflect broader patterns of injustice and resilience across time and cultures.



### Authentic Narratives and Diverse Perspectives

**Authentic Narratives and Diverse Perspectives** focuses on critically assessing whose voices are included or excluded in historical narratives, promoting authentic representation and balancing stories of oppression with resilience and agency.



### Transformative SEL

**Transformative SEL** empowers students to critically examine their identities, emotions and relationships within historical and contemporary contexts and apply Transformative SEL skills—such as ethical decision-making, perspective-taking and self-regulation—to civic engagement and social change.

# Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Practices

Instruction validates and affirms diverse identities, reflects underrepresented perspectives and connects learning to students’ lived experiences. Use this checklist during classroom observations or self-reflection to identify strengths and areas for growth in creating inclusive learning environments that include diverse perspectives and connect historical content to students’ lived experiences.

STUDENT BEHAVIORS TO OBSERVE	TEACHER PRACTICES TO OBSERVE
Students actively connect historical events to their cultural or community experiences, recognizing parallels between the past and their lived realities.	Teacher selects resources that validate diverse cultural, linguistic and community identities while prioritizing underrepresented perspectives.
Students engage with narratives from underrepresented groups, reflecting on how these perspectives challenge dominant stereotypes.	Teacher draws connections between historical content and students’ own cultural knowledge or experiences.
Students demonstrate curiosity and respect when learning from peers’ diverse perspectives and identities.	Teacher promotes peer-to-peer learning where students can share and explore different perspectives.
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## Practice Example

During a lesson that integrates ethnic studies, the teacher uses oral histories from local communities to teach about migration and resilience. Students reflect on parallels between these stories and their family histories, fostering personal connections and respect for community experiences.

# Historical Thinking and Analysis

Instruction promotes analytical skills, such as evaluating causation, interpreting multiple perspectives and constructing evidence-based arguments. Use this checklist during classroom observations or self-reflection to identify strengths and areas for growth in building learning opportunities that promote critical analysis of evidence across diverse sources, explore historical causation and significance and develop arguments from diverse sources of evidence.

STUDENT BEHAVIORS TO OBSERVE	TEACHER PRACTICES TO OBSERVE
Students evaluate the credibility of historical sources, identifying bias and constructing nuanced interpretations.	Teacher guides critical analysis of diverse primary and secondary sources, emphasizing representation, context and authenticity.
Students discuss historical causation and significance, connecting events to broader systemic patterns.	Teacher explains causation and significance, connecting historical events to systemic structures and global patterns.
Students analyze the power dynamics and social structures that influenced historical decisions and actions.	Teacher models critical questioning of how interpretations evolve over time and how bias shapes the way history is recorded and presented.
Students analyze continuity and change, identifying long-term impacts and shifts in societal norms or power structures.	Teacher guides students to compare historical events and trends to identify patterns of continuity and change.
Students construct arguments using evidence from diverse sources, identifying corroboration and contradictions.	Teacher models sourcing techniques, guiding students to evaluate and synthesize evidence effectively to support their interpretations.
Notes:	Notes:

## Practice Example

In a lesson on the civil rights movement, the teacher facilitates a discussion linking historical struggles for voting rights to present-day debates about voter suppression. Students analyze primary sources from the 1960s alongside contemporary articles and data, identifying systemic patterns and exploring how the legacy of past movements continues to influence current social and political issues.

# Critical Thinking and Inquiry-driven Learning

Instruction encourages students to investigate power, persistent disparities and complex social issues through inquiry-based learning. Use this checklist during classroom observations or self-reflection to identify strengths and areas for growth in fostering learning environments that promote critical thinking and inquiry and connect historical events to contemporary challenges.

STUDENT BEHAVIORS TO OBSERVE	TEACHER PRACTICES TO OBSERVE
Students generate meaningful questions about systemic inequities, historical events or narratives presented in class.	Teacher encourages students to question dominant narratives and probe deeper into the underlying causes and effects of persistent disparities.
Students propose evidence-based solutions to contemporary issues related to justice or equity, including students' own lived experiences.	Teacher offers frameworks and scaffolds for students to analyze contemporary challenges, drawing on historical and current examples to guide solution-oriented discussions.
Students connect the significance of historical events to present-day challenges and consider actionable steps to address them.	Teacher models explicit strategies for connecting historical patterns to present-day issues, producing actionable insights.
Students reflect on their assumptions and biases when engaging with sensitive or complex topics.	Teacher models reflective questioning, facilitates discussions to surface and examine biases and prompts students to critically evaluate their assumptions.
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## Practice Example

In a discussion about genocide, students investigate early warning signs of ethnic violence in a historical case. The teacher guides them to connect these signs to current human rights monitoring systems and brainstorm prevention strategies.

# Historical Knowledge and Global Awareness

Instruction situates events within local, national and global contexts, helping students understand continuity, change and interconnected systems. Use this checklist during classroom observations or self-reflection to identify strengths and areas for growth in building learning opportunities that contextualize history within broader or global frames and identify patterns and relationships across historical and contemporary events.

STUDENT BEHAVIORS TO OBSERVE	TEACHER PRACTICES TO OBSERVE
Students analyze connections between local, national and global historical events and their interdependence.	Teacher contextualizes historical events within broader systemic or global frameworks.
Students analyze continuity and change over time, identifying patterns and systemic relationships.	Teacher guides students through a comparative analysis of history to identify patterns, systemic relationships and continuity and change over time.
Students reflect on how understanding global history shapes their civic responsibilities today.	Teacher uses multiple mediums and diverse pedagogical strategies to illustrate global influences on local events and students' own lives.
Students make connections between historical events and contemporary global issues to consider potential solutions.	Teacher challenges simplistic narratives by introducing historical complexity, contradictions and unintended consequences of historical events and policies.
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## Practice Example

In a unit about genocides, students investigate how colonial legacies fostered ethnic tensions in post-independence Africa, examining their lasting impacts. The teacher deepens the discussion by connecting these historical dynamics to contemporary debates on reparations, encouraging students to draw parallels between past injustices and ongoing initiatives for reconciliation efforts.

# Authentic Narratives and Diverse Perspectives

Instruction uses authentic, diverse and meaningful narratives to engage students in critically analyzing historical events. Teachers prioritize centering voices from the communities represented and evaluating the authenticity and purpose of the narratives. Use this checklist during classroom observations or self-reflection to identify strengths and areas for growth in building learning opportunities that include diverse perspectives and connect students' narratives and experiences to their learning.

STUDENT BEHAVIORS TO OBSERVE	TEACHER PRACTICES TO OBSERVE
Students analyze and evaluate the credibility, purpose and intention of narratives within the resource.	Teacher selects resources that center authentic voices, such as survivors, community members and underrepresented perspectives.
Students critically examine which voices are included and which are excluded from the resource, proposing ways to address gaps.	Teacher demonstrates how to critically assess the validity and intention of narratives by posing questions like, "Who is telling this story and why?" or "What perspectives are missing?"
Students compare diverse perspectives on the same event, reflecting on how context, power and positionality shape narratives.	Teacher ensures that narratives balance oppression with acts of resistance and agency to provide a strength-based understanding of historical events.
Students connect narratives to their own lived experiences or cultural histories, fostering personal connection and relevance.	Teacher encourages reflection on the relationship between historical narratives and contemporary issues of power and justice, including students' own lived experiences.
Students identify and articulate the emotions, experiences or motivations of individuals or communities represented in historical narratives.	Teacher facilitates learning activities that prompt students to explore and empathize with the experiences, emotions and motivations of people from different historical contexts.
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## Practice Example

In a lesson about the Holocaust, the teacher presents a diary entry from a survivor alongside propaganda from the perpetrator and a news article from a bystander nation. Students analyze each source, discussing the purpose and credibility of the narratives. The teacher prompts them to consider whose voices are missing and asks, “What can we learn about resistance and resilience from the survivor’s account? How does propaganda attempt to rewrite the truth, and how might the bystander’s silence contribute to complicity?” Students then work in groups to compare these perspectives and reflect on how each shapes our understanding of the Holocaust.

# Transformative SEL

Instruction fosters self-awareness, empathy and responsible decision-making by integrating Transformative SEL into historical inquiry and civic engagement. Use this checklist during classroom observations or self-reflection to identify strengths and areas for growth in building a learning environment that integrates student self-reflection, fosters empathy and applies Transformative SEL to social science learning.

STUDENT BEHAVIORS TO OBSERVE	TEACHER PRACTICES TO OBSERVE
Students reflect on their identities, values and emotions, recognizing how they influence their understanding of history and societal issues.	Teacher guides self-reflection through journal prompts, identity mapping or storytelling that help students examine how their own identities, values and emotions shape their understanding of history and society.
Students engage in constructive dialogue and collaborative decision-making, demonstrating active listening and respect for diverse opinions.	Teacher models and reinforces constructive dialogue by establishing group expectations, using structured debate formats and encouraging collaborative decision-making.
Students recognize and challenge emotional appeals, bias and misinformation in narratives and media, evaluating how fear and persuasion shape social movements.	Teacher provides frameworks for evaluating emotional appeals, bias, and misinformation in narratives, propaganda and media, helping students understand how fear and persuasion shape social movements.
Students apply Transformative SEL strategies—such as ethical decision-making, self-regulation and advocacy—to real-world civic engagement.	Teacher connects ethical decision-making, self-regulation and advocacy to real-world social movements, showing how historical figures and students can take action.
Students develop strategies for managing emotions when engaging with difficult historical topics, fostering resilience and self-regulation.	Teacher implements trauma-informed teaching by preparing students for difficult topics, offering emotional check-ins and providing tools for reflection and processing.
Students reflect on how experiences and perspectives influence their understanding of historical events, considering how others may interpret events differently based on their experiences and social context.	Teacher prompts students to examine how they are positioned related to history and current social structures, using activities such as power mapping or analyzing their community's role in historical events.

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### Practice Example

During a unit on the civil rights movement, the teacher facilitates a discussion on the emotional and psychological impact of segregation by analyzing firsthand accounts from activists, opponents and bystanders. Students examine how fear, hope and resistance shaped the movement's strategies and public perception. The teacher encourages students to reflect on their own identities while drawing parallels to current struggles for voting rights and racial justice. To promote civic engagement, students apply Transformative SEL skills by collaboratively developing advocacy strategies for contemporary social issues.