

Holocaust Memorial Day 2026: Bridging Generations

THEME PAPER

Overview

Each year, Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) is shaped by a specific theme that guides how we remember, reflect and learn. At the heart of these commemorations are the voices of survivors and testimonies from individuals who were murdered in the Holocaust or in recent genocides. Their first-hand accounts deepen our emotional connection to the tragedy in a way no textbook ever could. They move us, challenge us, and - most importantly - stand as a powerful defence against the denial and distortion of history.

As time passes, however, we face the heartbreaking reality that within the next decade, we may no longer have the privilege of hearing these stories from those who lived through the horrors of the Holocaust - the systematic murder of six million Jewish men, women and children. And when that moment comes, we risk losing more than just personal memories. Without these living witnesses, the depth of the suffering and the urgency to confront hatred and intolerance in our own time could begin to fade. How, then, how do we ensure that the darkness of the Holocaust and the lessons it holds for all of us, are never forgotten?

HMD 2026 Theme

The theme for HMD 2026 - *Bridging Generations* - is a call to action. A reminder that the responsibility of remembrance does not end with the survivors - it lives on through their children, their grandchildren and through all of us.

This theme encourages us all to engage actively with the past: to listen, to learn and to carry those lessons forward. By doing so, we build a bridge between memory and action, between history and hope for the future.

Why 'Bridging Generations'?

As the years pass, we're growing more distant in time from the Holocaust and from the other, more recent genocides that are commemorated on HMD. That distance brings a risk: that memory fades, that the sharp reality of what happened becomes blurred, abstract or even questioned. *Bridging Generations* highlights the crucial role of the next generation in preserving the memory of the Holocaust and carrying it forward. It highlights the power of intergenerational dialogue - of listening to those who came before us and of sharing those stories with those who come after. In doing so, we don't just preserve memory - we connect it to the present.

Genocide doesn't discriminate by age: infants, children, adults and the elderly have all experienced unimaginable suffering in different ways. In many cases, entire family lines were erased. *Bridging Generations* invites us to honour each life - and honour those who left no family to carry their legacy - whose legacies live on not through bloodlines but through books, films and other interpretations.

Scope of the theme

a) Who are the 'generations'?

The murdered generation: The six million Jewish people murdered in the Holocaust, the non-Jewish people murdered because they were gay, disabled, Roma or Sinti, or a member of another community targeted by the Nazis. The millions of people murdered in the recent genocides recognised by the government (in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and the Yazidi people) and in Darfur. The generation of people whose lives and voices were brutally taken away.

The first generation: survivors themselves, those who lived through the Holocaust and other genocides. A few, precious, Holocaust survivors are with us still today. In addition, we can research the testimonies of those who survived the Holocaust and who died in the 1960s, 70s, 80s and more recently. This theme will encourage HMD organisers to research those who experienced and survived the Holocaust as adults but who passed away in the decades after the Holocaust.

The theme also includes the first-generation survivors of the more recent genocides, many of whom share their histories at HMD events each year.

The second and third generations - the children and grandchildren of survivors - carry that legacy in a deeply personal way. For them, these stories are family history.

People today - of any generation - with no direct family link to the Holocaust or to recent genocides - many of whom will be organising and participating in Holocaust Memorial Day events around the country. Their role is just as vital. Through education, dialogue and a willingness to engage, we all inherit the responsibility of remembrance. *Bridging Generations* is about all of us. It's about reaching across time and experience to keep memory and history alive and using them to shape a future that protects the dignity of every human being.

b) What does 'bridging' entail?

Bridging from person to person - this can include the transmission of memory, such as finding ways to share stories of the Holocaust and of recent genocides that resonate with people today - through testimonies, yes, and also through education, art, literature, film and digital media. It can include intergenerational dialogue: a grandparent sharing memories, a student interviewing a survivor or young people engaging with the children and grandchildren of survivors, these moments create space for understanding.

Bridging from 'silent witnesses' - historical artefacts are the 'silent witnesses' providing evidence of the past to generations today. These are literally 'articles of fact' - photographs, letters, diaries, documents and personal items that belonged to people who were persecuted, murdered or who survived - and which will continue to exist long after individuals have passed on. Learning about these artefacts, where they came from and how they arrived in the UK can tell us so much about the history of the Holocaust or of more recent genocides. Some are in museums around the UK and the world, others are included in our resources - you can find out how artefacts can help us bridge generations via our website.

Bridging from the historical record - digitised archives can help provide a bridge from the records of the past held in archives, museums or family collections.

Bridging Generations, will encourage a shared responsibility, recognising that remembrance is a shared task - one that requires every generation to step forward. Together at HMD, we'll build empathy and understanding, using the lessons of the Holocaust and of recent genocides to sharpen our awareness and deepen our compassion in the face of contemporary injustice.

Local HMD events

Your local HMD event could include any of the following elements:

- Create opportunities for individuals of different ages to come together and learn about the Holocaust, Nazi persecution and more recent genocides.
- Inspire young people to become active custodians of Holocaust remembrance - for example:
 - i) *Barnabas Balint* has been an HMDT Youth Champion and organises an annual HMD conference to encourage and facilitate his peers to learn more about the Holocaust and recent genocides.
- Empower current and future generations to stand up against prejudice, hate, intolerance and discrimination in all their forms.
- Explore the long-lasting effects of the Holocaust on survivors and their descendants (inter-generational trauma).
- Research digitised archives.
- Visit a Holocaust Museum (in person or online).

Life stories that could be included in your HMD event

Anne Frank was just 15 years old when she died of typhus at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. She, alongside countless other children, represent a generation of lives interrupted, taken too soon by the atrocities of the Holocaust. [Read Anne Frank's life story](#).

Peter Lantos BEM endured the horrors of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp where he lost most of his family. He later returned to his home country of Hungary where he suffered abuse at the hands of the communist government who had taken over the country. In spite of this, he earned a medical degree, eventually defecting to the UK.

Eva Clarke BEM was born under unimaginably harrowing circumstances in the final days of World War II. Her birth, on 29 April 1945, just outside the gates of Mauthausen Concentration Camp in Austria, came just one day after the Nazis had run out of gas for the chambers and less than a week before liberation.

Mala Tribich MBE was born in 1930 in Piotrków, Poland. Her early childhood was upended in 1939 when Nazi Germany invaded Poland and her family was forced into the Piotrków ghetto - the first Nazi ghetto established in Poland. She was then incarcerated at Ravensbrück concentration camp before being deported to Bergen-Belsen where she was eventually liberated by British forces in April 1945.

Li-Da Kruger, an award-winning filmmaker and producer, was born in Cambodia in 1975. She was evacuated from her homeland as a baby just days before the Khmer Rouge orchestrated the genocide that claimed over a million lives between 1975 and 1979.

Second, third and fourth generations

The impact of genocide doesn't end with those who directly experience it but can ripple through the generations. The children and grandchildren of survivors often carry the weight of inherited trauma, shaped by the memories of conversations with parents and grandparents and the silence of those who came before them.

Avital Mendelsohn's grandfather, Yisrael Abelesz, survived Auschwitz Birkenau and was liberated by the Russian forces at the age of 14. For the past few years, Avital has been sharing his life story of survival, hope and resilience. She believes she's continuing his legacy by educating others and encouraging meaningful discussion on how to create a more tolerant and empathetic world.

Contact [Generation 2 Generation](#) for more information about members of the second and third generations who convey the testimony of their relatives.

Baronita Adam is a member of the Roma community; she has spoken about the prejudice she has faced in her lifetime and about her mother's memories of being targeted by the Nazis and imprisoned in a concentration camp.

Further reading and resources

- [Generation 2 Generation](#)
- [Shoah Foundation](#)
- [Holocaust Testimony UK - AJR](#)
- [80 Objects/80 Lives](#)
- [Ordinary Objects Extraordinary Journeys \(OOEJ\)](#)
- [My Home Town Project](#)

Further reading

- ***The Diary of a Young Girl*, by Anne Frank.** Beginning on her thirteenth birthday, Anne's diary traces her experiences of persecution and hiding from the Nazis in World War II.
- ***Night*, by Elie Wiesel.** An account of the author and his father's experiences in Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps.
- ***Yellow Star-Red Star*, by Dr. Agnes Kaposi.** A poignant memoir of Dr. Agnes Kaposi, sharing her experience through the outbreak of World War II and how a series of miracles and coincidences allowed her to survive.
- ***Holocaust Trauma and Psychic Deformation: Psychoanalytic Reflections of a Holocaust Survivor*, by Alfred Garwood.** A survivor of Bergen-Belsen, Alfred Garwood explores the massive psychic trauma suffered by a generation of Holocaust survivors.

- ***Parallel Lines: A Journey from Childhood to Belsen*, by Peter Lantos.** The journey of a young boy from a sleepy provincial town in Hungary through war-torn Europe to the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen.
- ***Hitler, Stalin, Mum and Dad: A Family Memoir of Miraculous Survival*, by Daniel Finkelstein.** A deeply moving memoir about Daniel Finkelstein's parents' experience at the hands of two genocidal dictators of the 20th century.