

RESISTANCE, AGENCY, AND EMPOWERMENT

The Armenian Genocide: Background

Standards:

CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: WHST 9–10.9 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: WHST 11–12.9 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: RH.9-10.3 Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

Lesson Objectives / Student Outcomes

- Students will gain an understanding of the Armenian Genocide, including significant events, people, places, and times.
- Students will make connections with previously learned materials.

Materials

- Excerpt from *A Brief History of the Armenian Genocide* reading selection from The Genocide Education Project and/or *Armenian Genocide 1915-1922*
- [Armenian Genocide](#) CLIC video about the Armenian Genocide (If Needed)
- Copies of *A Brief History of the Armenian Genocide* from Day 3, as needed

Differentiation

- Students can work independently, in pairs, or small groups to help accommodate student needs and time.
- *Armenian Genocide 1915-1922* is a more accessible text (attached)
- A glossary is included to assist students with terms and academic vocabulary
- Students can also watch this video: [The Armenian Genocide: A Fight for Recognition](#) instead of reading.

Lesson Plan: 50 minutes

Review the concepts of resistance, agency, and empowerment.

Introduce students to the Armenian Genocide by assigning *A Brief History of the Armenian Genocide (continued segment)* for reading; while they are reading, they should be collecting information to create a visual timeline, such as:

- Dates of significant events in Armenian history
- Important people in Armenian history
- Anything else that seems significant

Formative and/or Summative Assessment

Have students refer to the topic they had on Day 1 when they were reading cases of genocide and using the Genocide Convention. What similarities can they make between the topic they had and the Armenian Genocide?

Glossary:

Committee of Union and Progress: an organization within the Young Turk movement . It ruled the Ottoman Empire from 1913 to 1918 and oversaw the Armenian Genocide.

Special Organization (SO): a special forces unit associated with the War Department in the Ottoman Empire. As part of the recruitment process for the SO, the Ottoman government released violent people from prison if they were willing to join the group. The SO participated directly in carrying out the Armenian Genocide.

Young Turks: a coalition of various groups, founded in the late nineteenth century, initially proposing civil reforms and modernization, but later carrying out policies to remove non-Turks and create a purely Turkish and Islamic state.

Anatolia: It is a peninsula that forms the western edge of Asia. It falls between the Black Sea to the north, the Mediterranean Sea to the south, the Aegean Sea to the west and the Taurus Mountains to the east. Today, most of Anatolia falls within Turkey.

Armenian Apostolic Church: The earliest accounts of the introduction of Christianity into Armenia date from the 1st century A.D. when it was first preached by two Apostles of Jesus, St. Bartholomew and St. Thaddeus. Armenia was the first country to adopt Christianity as its official religion, in 301.

Diaspora: The part of a national population that has been dispersed from its ancestral home or lands

Genocide: The deliberate and systematic destruction of a racial, political, or cultural group.

Ottoman Empire: An empire which lasted from 1453-1922 ruled by Seljuk Turks in Southwest Asia. At its height, the Empire stretched from Eastern Europe to North Africa. The Empire ended with the formation of modern Turkey.

Pan-Turkism: An ideology seeking the creation of a new Turkish empire stretching from Anatolia into Central Asia whose population would be exclusively Turkic.

Scapegoat: One that bears the blame for others.

Ambassador Henry Morgenthau: (1856-1946) The U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire during the Armenian Genocide. Morgenthau sent reports to Washington, DC that “a carefully planned scheme to thoroughly extinguish the Armenian race... a campaign of race extermination is in progress.”

Nationalism: Loyalty and devotion to a nation, especially a sense of national consciousness exalting one nation above all others and placing primary emphasis on promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations or supranational groups.

Sultan: The title of a ruler or king of a Muslim state. It was the title used for the leaders of the Ottoman Empire. Talaat Pasha: (1847- 1921) The principal architect of the Armenian Genocide. In 1909 he was appointed Minister of the Interior, and then by 1913, Secretary General. After the Genocide, Talaat fled to Germany and in 1921 was gunned down by an Armenian who had lost his family to the genocide.

Turkification: The process of destroying cultures of non-Turkic origin within the Ottoman Empire during the final years of the Ottoman Empire and the early years of modern Turkey.



A Brief History of the Armenian Genocide

(continuation from Day 3 reading)

The Armenian Genocide



The culprits of the Adana Massacre were never punished and after 1909, an extreme nationalist political movement promoting a policy of Pan-Turkism (“Turkey for the Turks”) gained backing from Turkish populations throughout the Ottoman Empire. In addition, the Ottoman Empire, now known as the “sick man of Europe,” was weakened by the loss of its lands in southeastern Europe in the Balkan Wars of 1912-13. One of the Ottoman Empire’s greatest enemies was Russia, as Russia was constantly threatening the security of the Ottoman borders and controlled parts of the eastern edge of the Ottoman Empire that was populated by Armenians. Since the Russians had advocated for Armenian reforms in the past and because the Russian army did have Armenians serving as soldiers, the Ottoman government was concerned that Ottoman Armenians might commit traitorous acts. This fear helped to fuel Turkish public sentiment against Armenians.

The Ottoman Empire entered World War I in 1914, fighting against Russia in campaigns that straddled territory inhabited by Armenians on both sides of the border. The Ottoman Empire was badly defeated by Russia in a campaign in the winter of 1914-15, and the government then made the Armenian community a scapegoat for the military losses that had occurred at the hands of the Russians.

By the spring of 1915, leaders of the ruling party, the CUP, seized the opportunity of a world preoccupied by war to erase the Armenian presence from almost all Ottoman lands. The CUP was a triumvirate led by Mehmet Talaat, Ismail Enver, and Ahmed Jemal.

Beginning on April 24, 1915 (now commemorated as the beginning of the Armenian Genocide), Armenian civil leaders, intellectuals, doctors, businessmen, and artists were rounded up and killed. Once these leaders of the Armenian communities were killed, the Genocide plan was put into motion throughout the empire. Many Armenian men were quickly executed.

Using new technologies, such as the telegraph and the railroads, CUP leaders sent orders to provincial leaders to gather women and children and either load them onto trains headed for the Syrian Desert or lead them on forced marches into the desert. Embarking with little food and few supplies, women and children had little hope of survival.

On these journeys, Turkish gendarmes regularly subjected Armenian women to sexual violence. Special militias were created by the government to carry out the deportations and murders; and Turkish and Kurdish convicts who had been set free from jails brutalized and plundered the deportation caravans winding through the severe terrain. Some women and children were abducted and sold, or children were raised as Turks by Turkish families. Some Armenians were rescued by Bedouins and other Arabs who sympathized with the Armenian situation. Sympathetic Turkish families also risked their own lives to help their Armenian neighbors escape.

Within months, the Euphrates and Tigris rivers became clotted with the bodies of Armenian women and children, polluting the water supply for those who had not yet perished. Dysentery and other diseases were rampant and

those who managed to survive the march found themselves in concentration camps.

By 1918, most of the Armenians who had resided in this historic land were dead or in the Diaspora. Under the orders of Turkey's new leader, Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk), the remaining Armenians in western Cilicia (the region of the Ottoman Empire originally inhabited by Armenians) were expelled, as were the Greek and Assyrian populations.

By 1923, a 3,000-year-old civilization virtually ceased to exist. One and a half million Armenians, more than half of the Armenian population on its historic homeland, were dead, and the Armenian community and personal properties were lost, appropriated by the government, stolen by others or deliberately destroyed. Only a small number of Armenians remained in the former Ottoman capital of Constantinople.

The Denial

The term "genocide" was not created until 1944. It was devised by a legal scholar, Raphael Lemkin, who had been strongly influenced by his study of the Armenian case and the persecution of Jews under Nazi rule. In 1946, the United Nations adopted the language and two years later the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was passed. Despite the affirmation of the Armenian Genocide by the overwhelming majority of historians, academic institutions on Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and governments around the world, the Turkish government still actively denies the Armenian Genocide.

Among a series of actions enacted to counter Armenian Genocide recognition and education, the Turkish government even passed a law in 2004 known as Article 305 which makes it a criminal offense, punishable by up to 10 years in prison, to discuss the Armenian Genocide.

Most of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide have now passed away. Their families still continue to demand recognition for the suffering inflicted upon their beloved ancestors more than 90 years ago.

Armenian Genocide 1915-1922

Amidst the turmoil of World War I, the Turkish government of the Ottoman Empire undertook the annihilation of the Armenians living within its ruled territories. During the Armenian Genocide, an estimated 1,500,000 Armenians, more than half of the Armenian population living on their historic homeland, were destroyed and dispossessed of all their personal and community properties on the orders of the empire's Turkish leaders.

The vast murders were carried out through execution, death marches, drowning, burning and other means. In addition to the Armenians, who constituted the largest ethnic minority in the empire, hundreds of thousands of Assyrians and Greeks were also targeted and massacred.

Founded at the end of the thirteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was once a major world power. It had long been a diverse home to many ethnicities and religions, but major dividing lines separated Ottoman Turks from non-Turkic people. Under the Ottomans, Armenians were allowed to maintain some cultural traditions, such as their style of dress, but they were subject to more restrictive and repressive laws than those applied to Turks. For instance, Armenians paid extra taxes and were not allowed to testify in court. Additionally, Turks often referred to Armenians pejoratively as *infidels* or *gavours* (non-believers) and *dogs*.

By the mid-1800s, the once-powerful Ottoman Empire appeared to be crumbling. It suffered from extreme corruption and mismanagement and continued to lose territories when provinces under its control fought for and won independence. Many in the empire felt humiliated by its defeats and Turkish nationalist movements gained prominence. In 1908, a group called the Committee of Union and Progress, or "Young Turks," had enough power to overthrow the Ottoman sultan.

The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) said they wanted to modernize the country, and at first, non-Turkic people of the Ottoman Empire joined Turks in the revolutionary movement with the goal of creating a new government based on a democratic constitution. Soon after gaining power, however, the more extreme nationalist wing of the party took hold of the movement. They instituted a policy to create a homogenous Turkish nation, turning against anyone in the empire who was not ethnically Turkish. From the beginning of its rule, the CUP's leadership planned for the future massacres. As the largest minority group, the politically defenseless Armenians were its primary targets.

Despite Armenians' loyalty to the Ottoman government and its war efforts, the CUP ran a propaganda campaign to convince the population that Armenians were

enemies and traitors . By 1913, it created the secret “Special Organization,” an army of killing units largely comprised of violent individuals, who the CUP had released from prison for the purpose of joining the units. The “Special Organization participated in the genocidal process under the pretext that minority groups were influenced by outside powers and posed a threat to national security .

On April 24, 1915, the CUP closed all Armenian political organizations and arrested 200-300 intellectuals and political and religious leaders in Constantinople, the capital . Most of these men were deported east and killed. Men serving in the Ottoman army were disarmed and forced into labor battalions. Soon after, Interior Minister Talaat Pasha ordered the deportation of the Armenian population. Those Armenians who were not killed were taken as wives or servants or were sent on death marches. The people forced to march into the desert often died from starvation, dehydration, exhaustion, or physical attacks including rape and mutilation, and burning. One such march began with 18,000 Armenians and ended with only 150 survivors. Additionally, property belonging to Armenians—their personal belongings, businesses, farms, community institutions, including schools, hospitals, churches, etc .—were stolen or destroyed. Entire villages were burned. A program to repopulate the area with Turks was carried out.

After the genocide, there was a short-lived attempt at justice. Under pressure from Europe, a series of war crimes trials were undertaken, but mostly abandoned, with the major perpetrators of the genocide, who had fled the country, going unpunished. In the absence of criminal trials, in the 1920s, a secret group of Armenians assassinated the architects of the genocide. Meanwhile, a new nationalist movement—including many of the genocide’s perpetrators—took control of the government. The multicultural nature of the Ottoman Empire, now called Turkey, was destroyed. Surviving Armenians who had escaped death dispersed across the globe.

In 1918, Armenians living in the small piece of their homeland that had been controlled by Russia, declared independence. But it only lasted until 1920, when it was taken over by the newly-established Soviet Union. After 70 years of Soviet rule, Armenia again declared itself an independent republic in 1990.

Although the United Nations, the International Association of Genocide Scholars, and many governments and historical institutions recognize the Armenian Genocide, the Turkish government has always denied that genocide was committed. It has conducted a massive campaign to prevent the global population from knowing about the genocide and to discredit scholarly and political efforts that address it. In recent decades, those who have written or taught about this genocide have been intimidated, imprisoned, and even assassinated.

BASIC FACTS

Targets:

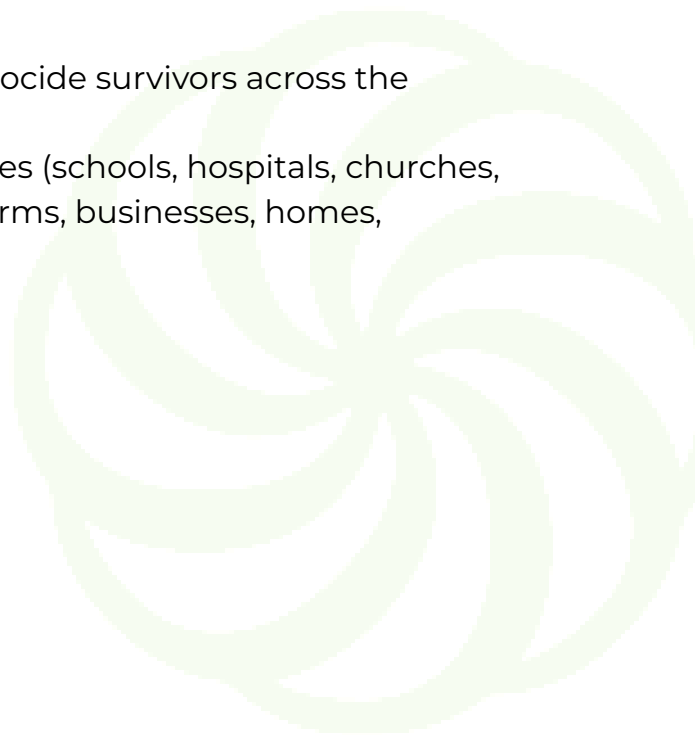
- The Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire
- Other non-Turkish or non-Islamic groups, such as Greeks and Assyrians

Perpetrators:

- Committee of Union and Progress (“Young Turks”)
- Leadership: the “Three Pashas”: Talaat Pasha, Enver Pasha, Djemal Pasha
- Kurds, an ethnic group who also lived in the Ottoman Empire
- The “Special Organization”: a paramilitary secret police organization organized under the Ministry of War and formed of tribesmen (mostly Circassians and Kurds) and more than 10,000 convicted criminals.

Results:

- 1.5 million Armenians killed (about 80% of the pre-1914 Armenian population)
- The end of an Armenian presence in their historic homeland
- The destruction of Armenian cultural and historical sites and landmarks throughout the Ottoman Empire
- Diaspora, or dispersion, of Armenian genocide survivors across the world
- Theft of Armenians’ community properties (schools, hospitals, churches, theaters, etc) and personal properties (farms, businesses, homes, personal wealth)



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