



## The Assyrian Genocide: Media during WWI

**Time:** 60 minutes (please note: this learning activity can also be combined with the testimonies of the Assyrian genocide for a combined lesson of appx. 90 minutes)

**Audience:** Grades 9-12

### Student Outcomes:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand how the Ottoman Empire carried out a genocide against Assyrians in both the Ottoman Empire and Persia.
- Understand the immediate and long-term impact of the genocide on Assyrians.
- Analyse why these atrocities are understood to be genocide, even though the word did not yet exist when they took place.
- Analyse primary source documents.

### Aligned Standards (California Common Core):

- Direct education on the WWI genocide carried out by the Ottoman Empire (CA.HSS-10.5.5)
- The effects of the First World War on population movement and changing borders in the Middle East (CA.HSS-10.6.2)
- Students analyze instances of nation-building, genocide, and mass violence in the contemporary world (CSS.HSS-10.10)
- Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1)
- Determine the central ideas of a source and summarize key details and ideas (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2)
- Compare the perspectives of multiple authors or witnesses on the same historical event (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6)
- Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1)
- Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7)
- Integrate information from diverse sources into a coherent understanding of an idea or event (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9)

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## Context:

Researching the Assyrian genocide presents particular challenges as the genocide is lesser known than the concurrent Armenian genocide, and challenges are compounded by the Assyrian experience as a smaller, less visible, population in more remote areas of the Ottoman Empire and Persia, with several sectarian and national identities. These atrocities also took place before the word genocide was coined, and so we cannot search 'Assyrian genocide' to find newspaper accounts from when the genocide took place. As such, this lesson asks students to use primary source documents - here, newspaper articles - to examine what was written about the genocide as it was happening, looking at words used to describe the violence and assess what was known to the international community at the time.

This lesson has several goals: to support understanding of the Assyrian genocide; to gain experience analyzing news articles to support information literacy and media analysis; and to combat denialism through use of primary sources and the historical record.

Supporting materials are offered to guide instruction on how the Ottoman Empire carried out a policy of genocide against Assyrians living within the Ottoman Empire and Persia during the First World War and the continued impact of these atrocities on the Assyrian population today.

## Materials:

- ['Assyrian Genocide Timeline'](#)
- ['An Overview of the Assyrian Genocide'](#)
- Glossary: ['Key Terms'](#)
- [Article Analysis worksheet](#)
- Newspaper articles
  - New York Times articles [provided here](#)
  - California articles [provided here](#) (please note materials from newspapers in specific states or countries can be requested)
- Optional: [Instructional slides/images](#)

## Differentiation:

- Gifted learners: mapping where events are occurring; examine multiple articles, write narrative based on those accounts
- ESL: News articles in foreign-language papers
- SpEd: Simplify worksheet to reflect individual needs or utilize a verbal discussion about the article rather than a worksheet

**Assessment(s):** Analysis [worksheet](#), written reflections

## Lesson/Activity:

- 1) Class Lesson:
  - Teacher provides students with material handouts (brief overview of the genocide, key terms, timeline)
  - Teacher asks students what they know about the Assyrian population; and shares information to situate Assyrians in the Ottoman Empire
  - Teacher asks students to discuss the key terms, providing supplemental information on key events (optional - using slides with maps and images)
  - (If using both lesson plans, teachers will have already done this)
  
- 2) Article analysis:
  - Distribute article analysis worksheets and articles from the provided collection (teachers may wish to divide articles amongst groups)
  - Students individually complete an article analysis worksheet for the article(s) assigned to them.
    - Option for students to conduct their own research if access to a newspaper database is available:
      - Direct students to the database to which they have access (for example, *New York Times* archive)
      - Discuss with students how to conduct a search for material from the relevant time period (suggested parameters are dates of 1914 to 1919) and discuss keyword strategies
      - For example, 'Assyrian Genocide' should not turn up any results; instead, Assy\* could capture Assyro-Chaldean, Assyria, Assyrian, Assyrians; students may also wish to search by key names or places found in the student materials (Shimun, Agha Petros), or by a combination of 'Christians' and geographic location (Persian Christians, Ottoman Christians)
      - Students carry out their own searches (and hopefully uncover an article!)
      - Students complete an article analysis for the article(s) they found
  
- 3) Group discussion:
  - Students discuss their article analyses.
  - Using student learning materials, students examine where their articles fit, geographically and chronologically, within the historical narrative of the Assyrian genocide.
  
- 4) Class discussion:
  - Groups share the highlights of their article analyses with the class
    - If doing own research, students may also discuss what research parameters worked well or did not work
  - Students discuss potential challenges of conducting research during this period (for example, the absence of a single word like genocide to describe events, translation issues, multiple spellings of locations, multiple ways Assyrians are identified, and misidentifying Assyrians as members of other groups).

5) Individual reflection:

- Students write a concluding reflection explaining what they understand about the genocide and exploring what impact it had on the Assyrian community.
- Students share their reflections in groups or as a class.

## Supplemental Resources:

Please visit the 'more resources' section of our website, [www.assyriangenocidestudies.org](http://www.assyriangenocidestudies.org), for additional resources.

## References:

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Joel Werda (1924) *The Flickering Light of Asia, Or, The Assyrian Nation and Church*, self-published.

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Map: 'The Ottoman Empire: 1350-1918', The Islam Project, available at [www.theislamproject.org/education/Ottoman\\_Empire.html](http://www.theislamproject.org/education/Ottoman_Empire.html).

Map by Kathovo, Assyrian population 1914, Wikimedia Commons, modified by E. Hughes: [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Assyrian\\_population\\_1914.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Assyrian_population_1914.svg)