



**CALIFORNIA TEACHERS
COLLABORATIVE FOR
HOLOCAUST AND
GENOCIDE EDUCATION**

The Assyrian Genocide: Memories of Seyfo

Time: 60 minutes (please note: this learning activity can also be combined with the unit on newspaper accounts 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 survivor testimonies.

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 (CA.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:

The Assyrian genocide is lesser known than the concurrent Armenian genocide, and understanding Assyrian experiences provides a fuller understanding of this period as well as a richer understanding of Assyrian migration to California and continued displacement today. More Assyrians today live in diaspora than in their indigenous homelands of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, a direct consequence of the genocide followed by persecution under unfriendly governments.

This lesson draws on individual and family memories of the Assyrian Genocide to develop student understanding of lived experiences whilst exercising analytical skills. Supporting materials are provided to help facilitate 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’](#)
- Personal Histories or Oral History Video Excerpts
 - [Written testimonies](#) (folder includes):
 - Iniar Jajoo
 - Elishwa Issa
 - Rose Sargis
 - Matilda Kachachi
 - Susan and Vartan Danavi
 - Mishael Shumon Enviya
 - Video testimonies: [Oral History video collection](#)
- [Testimony analysis worksheet](#)
- Optional: [Instructional slides/images](#)

Differentiation:

- Gifted learners: mapping oral histories, look at what government areas are under today; read multiple histories and write reflection or make presentations on common themes across the histories
- ESL: potential to translate written testimonies

- SpEd: Prioritize short video interviews or discuss a short reading as a class; verbal reflection discussion

Assessment(s): Reflections; written responses to guiding questions; testimony analysis

Lesson/Activity:

1) Personal Testimonies:

- Share [written testimony](#) with students (and/or [oral history video clips](#)) and ask students to write a reflection on what they read or heard using the questions below as a guide.

**Content notice for these testimonies: Due to the themes of hatred and discrimination that this lesson focuses on, it is recommended that students receive advanced notice of the challenging nature of the subject. Frame the lesson as a continuing conversation, and remind students of their options if they feel they need to take a break.*

- Student discussion (as a class or in groups):
 - What is being described?
 - What happened to their family during these events?
 - What happened to their family after?
 - What could have caused this?
 - Why might the descendants of genocide survivors be sharing these stories?

2) Defining Genocide:

- Students are reminded that when these atrocities occurred, the concept of genocide had not yet been created. These atrocities were referred to as the Seyfo, annihilation, race murder, massacres, slaughter, and other terms. Students are provided with a definition of genocide (the UN genocide convention definition is recommended).
- Students discuss the meaning of this definition
- Students discuss if anything shared in the personal histories sounds like what is described here

3) History Lesson:

- Teacher provides students with material handouts (timeline, key terms, map, and brief overview of the genocide)
- 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)

4) Individual reflection and discussion:

- Students write a reflection comparing how the Assyrian (and Armenian, if already studied) experiences during WWI fit with our understanding of genocide, drawing on testimonies and written materials
- Students discuss their thoughts in groups or as a class

Supplemental Resources:

Please visit the 'more resources' section of our website, www.assyriangenocidestudies.org, for additional resources.

References:

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David Gaunt (2006) 'Massacres and Resistance: The Genocide of Armenians and Assyrians Based on New Evidence from the Archives', Lecture, National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, 7 December 2006.

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Anahit Khosroeva (2017) 'Assyrians In the Ottoman Empire and the Official Turkish Policy of their Extermination' in *Genocide in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. George Shirinian, Berghan Books.

Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun (1945) 'Petition on Behalf of the Assyrian Nation', Letter to Alger Hiss, Secretary of the United Nations, May 7, 1945.

Hannibal Travis (2006) 'Native Christians Massacred' *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 1(3).

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.

Map by Kathovo, Assyrian population 1914, Wikimedia Commons, modified by E. Hughes:
commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Assyrian_population_1914.svg