

## Lesson: Siege of Sarajevo



**Audience: Grades 9 - 12**

### **Student Outcomes**

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

- Explain the history of the Siege of Sarajevo and the various influences from outside sources that contributed to bringing it to an end.
- Explain the key elements that led to the Siege of Sarajevo.
- Analyze how the siege affected various groups within Sarajevo (civilian casualties, displacement, psychological trauma) and evaluate citizen-created survival materials used during the siege.

### **Aligned Standards (California Common Core)**

- HSS.12.7.8 — Analyze causes, responses, and long-term effects of post–World War II conflicts and peacebuilding using primary and secondary sources.
- HSS-11.9.1 — Explain the political, ethnic, and social causes and key events of late-20th-century conflicts.
- HSS-11.9.2 — Assess the human costs of conflict, including civilian casualties, displacement, and psychological trauma, using eyewitness and documentary evidence.
- HSS-10.5.5 — Use historical evidence from primary and secondary sources to support claims and explanations.

- HSS-10.9.8 — Evaluate the role and effectiveness of international institutions and interventions in humanitarian crises.

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**Context:** This one/two-day lesson (adapted here for a 55-minute class) engages students with the history, human costs, and international responses to the Siege of Sarajevo (1992–1995). Using primary and secondary sources, short film clips, survivor testimony, and citizen-created survival materials, students will analyze the effects of urban warfare on civilians and evaluate the effectiveness of survival strategies developed by Sarajevans.

Essential questions include: What was the historical and political context leading up to the war? What were the human costs of the siege? What was the international community’s response and the challenges of intervention?

**Materials:**

- Preview short film: [Sarajevo: City Under Siege](#)
- Review Article: [The Serbs shelled Sarajevo for almost four years. Bosniaks hid from snipers’ shells and bullets, resisted, and waited for NATO’s help. This is how it was](#)
- Review: [academic research on urban war and the impact on the various citizens of Sarajevo.](#)
- Preview the handouts used in this lesson
  - [Security Council Report on the Siege of Sarajevo](#)
  - [Survival Map of Sarajevo](#)
  - [Sarajevo Survival Guide 1993](#)
- Optional: watch [The Siege of Sarajevo: A Survivor’s Real-life Stories](#)

**Glossary:**

**Blockade:** An act of war whereby one party blocks entry to or departure from a defined part of an enemy's territory.

**Bombarded:** Attack (a place or person) continuously with bombs, shells, or other missiles.

**Bosnian War:** Ethnically rooted war (1992–1995) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a former republic of Yugoslavia with a multiethnic population comprised of Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Serbs, and Croats.

**Sarajevo:** National capital, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Siege:** A situation in which soldiers or police officers surround a city, building, etc., in order to try to take control of it; a serious and lasting attack of something, usually singular.

**Submission:** An act of giving a document, proposal, piece of writing, etc., to someone so that it can be considered or approved: an act of submitting something.

**Differentiation:**

- **English Learners:** Use the [USHMM encyclopedia](#) articles to translate terminology in various languages.
- **Special Education:** Use the [Bosnia-Herzegovina Country Profile](#) to better understand Bosnia's demographics and timeline. Invite students to watch the summary of Zlata's Diary, in which she describes life in Sarajevo during the war as a young girl.
- **Accelerated Learners:** For advanced learners, offer to read *Sarajevo: The Longest Siege* by Amra Abadzic. Invite students to view a recording of the author [discussing the book](#). Allow them to take a deep dive into the impact on children, particularly students, during the siege.

**Assessment(s):**

- [Sample Summative Assessment](#)

**Lesson/Activity:**

Lesson / Activity (55 minutes)

Opening (5–7 minutes)

- Share lesson objectives and essential questions.
- Quick review of vocabulary and context (use Glossary).
- Possible video to view and discuss: [The Siege That Devastated Sarajevo](#)

#### Discussion Prompts

1. What does the video imply is the reason for why the Serbian army attacked the civilians of Sarajevo?
2. What did the civilians do when the blockade started?
3. For how many months was Sarajevo under attack?

- Possible reading for context and discussion: [Sarajevo Marks 30-Year Anniversary of the Siege](#)

#### Prompts

1. What facts about the siege stand out most to you?
2. What does survivor testimony tell us about the effect of war on children?

#### Lesson Body (35–40 minutes)

Teach objectives using the resources and materials listed below.

1. Distribute Security Council Report on the [Siege of Sarajevo: Summary and Analysis](#)
2. Use [this handout](#) to guide small-group discussions.

After students have discussed and analyzed the Security Council Report on the Siege of Sarajevo, ask them to imagine what day-to-day life would have been like during this time in Sarajevo. Students will evaluate some of the materials and resources that citizens created and used to survive during the siege.

Ask students to work together with partners or in small groups and answer the questions about the effectiveness of the survival guide and the survival map of Sarajevo.

1. Distribute [Survival Map of Sarajevo](#)
2. [Sarajevo Survival Guide 1993](#)
3. Use [this handout](#) to guide small-group discussions.

#### Closing (5–8 minutes)

- View the CNN report of [Romeo and Juliet of Sarajevo](#)

Ask students: How does the setting of Sarajevo during the Bosnian War influence the development of the relationship between “Romeo and Juliet”?

Whole-class discussion or think-pair-share: How does the setting of Sarajevo during the Bosnian War influence the development of the relationship between “Romeo and Juliet”?

Exit ticket: One short written response to an essential question (e.g., What was one human cost of the siege and how did ordinary citizens respond?).

### **Extensions / Supplemental Resources**

1. Create a timeline of key events during the Siege of Sarajevo.
2. Research a prominent figure (e.g., Vedran Smajlović, the "Cellist of Sarajevo").
3. Write a creative piece (poem, song, short story) conveying the emotions and experiences of Sarajevans.
4. Participate in a class debate on ethical dilemmas faced during the siege (humanitarian aid decisions).
5. Awareness project on the Siege’s impact on Bosnia and Herzegovina.
6. View the film, [Scream For Me Sarajevo](#).

*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.*

### **References**

- Abadžić, A. (2022). Sarajevo: The longest siege. [No Publisher].
- Demick, B. (2012). Logavina Street: Life and death in a Sarajevo neighborhood. Random House Publishing Group.
- Morrison, K., & Lowe, P. (2021). Reporting the siege of Sarajevo. Bloomsbury Publishing.