

Darfur Genocide: The Promise to Prevent and Punish

Time: 60 minutes (options to extend lesson to 90 minutes included)

Audience: 9th – 12th grade. Can be adapted for 8th grade.

Student Outcomes

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

- Explain the purpose and legal obligations of the UN Genocide Convention
- Analyze Article I (duty to prevent and punish) and Article II (definition) of the UN Genocide Convention
- Evaluate primary source evidence from U.S. government officials and survivors
- Develop a claim supported by textual evidence

Aligned Standards (California Common Core)

- **RH.6–8.1 / RH.9–10.1 / RH.11–12.1** – Students cite specific textual evidence from primary and secondary sources to support analysis and claims.
- **RH.6–8.2 / RH.9–10.2 / RH.11–12.2** – Students determine central ideas of informational texts and summarize complex sources accurately.
- **RH.9–10.6 / RH.11–12.6** – Students analyze and compare differing points of view across sources, including government reports and survivor testimony.
- **RH.9–10.8 / RH.11–12.8** – Students evaluate claims, reasoning, and evidence in historical arguments, assessing credibility and effectiveness.
- **RH.9–10.9 / RH.11–12.9** – Students compare and synthesize information across multiple sources to build a coherent understanding of genocide and international response.
- **SL.8.1 / SL.9–10.1 / SL.11–12.1** – Students engage in collaborative discussions, building on peers' ideas and clearly expressing evidence-based reasoning.
- **SL.8.2 / SL.9–10.2 / SL.11–12.2** – Students integrate and interpret information presented in diverse formats, including video, testimony, maps, and reports.
- **W.8.1 / W.9–10.1 / W.11–12.1** – Students write arguments supported by logical reasoning and relevant textual evidence.
- **W.8.9 / W.9–10.9 / W.11–12.9** – Students draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and argumentative writing.

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Overview

The United Nations General Assembly officially enacted the [Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#) on December 11, 1948. As of June 2024, 153 nations have ratified or acceded to the Genocide Convention.¹ This significant law, despite its many flaws, is a cornerstone of international human rights law and has become a touchstone of human rights education. Why? It is an essential law focused on holding perpetrators accountable for unimaginable crimes and colloquially the word “genocide” has become synonymous with evil, inhumanity, and horror. Yes, the word genocide has cultural gravitas, but does its existence mean anything in practice? Does/can a word stop or prevent a crime from happening? Despite its passage in 1948, it took the United States nearly 60 years before it referred to an ongoing atrocity as a genocide. Why?

In this lesson students are asked to consider the utility of the UN Genocide Convention through the case study of the Darfur Genocide. Students will do the following:

1. Scrutinize Article I—which compels nations to act to prevent and punish the crime of genocide—and Article II—the definition of the crime—of the Genocide Convention.
2. Analyze primary source documents from the US government and survivor testimony to assess the value/futility of this well-known international law.
3. Reflect on the usefulness of the UN Genocide Convention by studying Secretary of State Colin Powell’s historic determination of the genocide in Darfur in 2004, the first time a sitting member of the US government invoked the Genocide Convention.

Differentiation

Processing Options for Primary Source Analysis:

- This lesson plan includes an activity where students are asked to visit four different stations, analyze primary source documents and testimony, and respond to reflection questions. To help facilitate group learning, break students into groups of four and assign the following roles: Reader (reads text out loud); Summarizer (describes visual evidence); Connector (links primary source to genocide definition); Recorder (writes out answer to question posted at each station).
- Instead of a complete gallery walk or station activity (there are four in total), consider having students/groups pick 2-3 stations to visit to reduce cognitive load.

English Language Development, ESL, EFL, ESOL

- Prior to class, have students review key terms associated with this lesson as identified [“Glossary, Darfur Genocide”](#)
- In Step 4 of this lesson, students are asked to watch a video of former Secretary of State Collin Powell’s address to Congress about genocide in Darfur. In addition to showing the video, you may want to have students have the text of that address in front of them. You can locate a copy of his [statement here](#).

¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Transitional Justice: The Legal Framework,” accessed April 13, 2026, <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/simon-skjodt-center/work/ferencz-international-justice-initiative/transitional-justice/the-legal-framework>.

Advanced Student Options:

- This lesson plan analyzes the Darfur Genocide starting in 2003. In 2025, the UN determined that genocide is currently happening in Darfur. For homework, consider asking students to research what sources/information the [UN used to make its determination](#) in 2025. To do so, you can encourage them to visit the UN website for current news articles about the atrocity and to explore the United States Holocaust Memorial Museums digital exhibit "[Darfur](#)".
- You may also find it helpful to have students read "[Historic Overview, Darfur Genocide](#)" as pre-assigned homework.

Assessment

Throughout the lesson, you are given options for different types of assessments for your class. Please review the lesson plan to see which option makes the most sense for your students.

Disclaimer

Please note, due to the challenging themes of war, violence, and genocide, it is recommended that you give students a trigger warning about 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. Ultimately, you know your students best and what they can handle, so please take that into consideration. For additional resources on trigger warnings, see "Supplemental Resources."

Materials:

- [Handout 1: Articles I and II of the UN Genocide Convention](#)
- [Google Slides](#)

For Gallery Walk/Group Discussions

- [A: Darfur Refugees Report Numerous Acts of Violence](#)
- [B: Destroyed Village of Darurja, Sudan](#)
- [C: Destroyed Villages Reported by Refugees in Chad](#)
- [D: Historic Genocide Determination](#)

Additional Resources for Educators:

- All materials listed above are also shared in Google Slides. If printing is not an option, you can guide students through the materials as a class.
- [Historical Overview, Darfur Genocide](#)
- [Glossary, Darfur Genocide](#)

Lesson/Activity:

1. Introduction to Context: Why do states have laws? Why do we have international laws? [5 minutes]

- Explain to students that today we are going to be studying the UN Genocide Convention to determine whether laws are useful tools in preventing human rights crimes. To get things started, pose the following questions to the class:
 - Show Slide 2. The state of California has thousands of laws and statues across 29 different legal codes (such as the Penal Code, Vehicle Code, and Family Code), ranging from traffic regulations, business codes, and civil regulations. In your opinion, why do societies have laws? Come up with at least 3 reasons.
 - Show Slide 3. Unlike national laws, there are also tens of thousands of treaties, conventions, and agreements that make up international laws. These span areas like human rights, trade, digital privacy compliance, crisis management, environmental protection, and more. In your opinion, why do we have/need international laws? Come up with at least 3 reasons.

2. UN International Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) [20 minutes]

- Introduce students to the history and text of the UN Genocide Convention.
 - Show Slide 4 and explain the following: This law was created by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jewish refugee and survivor of the Holocaust. He came up with the idea of “genocide” before the Holocaust had happened. He was shocked to learn that after the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923), the perpetrators were able to live out their lives freely in Germany and elsewhere because no international law existed to hold them accountable for their organized murder of 1.5 million Armenians. He formalized the term for genocide in 1944, and given his incredible advocacy, it was adopted by the UN Nations in 1948.
- Distribute Handout 1: Articles I and II of the UN Genocide Convention (you can also show Article 1 on Slide 5 and Article 2 on Slide 6)
 - Show Slide 7. Review the answers to the handout questions.
 - What is the difference between Articles I and II of the UN Genocide Convention? (*Article I calls upon states to prevent and punish genocide; Article II defines genocide*)
 - What obligations do states have under the Genocide Convention? (*to “prevent and punish”*)
 - Show Slide 8. Pose the following question to the class. Discuss in small groups or together:

- Why is Article I a call to “prevent and punish”? Why not start with the definition? *(to emphasize action and responsibility – emphasizes the living nature of this convention, it is more than a definition, it is a promise to act).*
- Explain that despite the creation of the UN Genocide Convention in 1948, and the hope embedded in it, genocide didn’t stop when the word was invented and the UN Genocide Convention created.
- Show Slide 9, [“How Genocide Became Part of International Law”](#) (3:24). Warning: this film explains that despite the creation of this law, genocide has continued. To make this point, it shows three graphic images from the Rwandan Genocide and Bosnian Genocide.
- Show Slide 10, Transition to Case Study: Explain that it took the US nearly 60 years before it referred to an ongoing atrocity as a genocide. Today we will learn how that happened, why, and what role survivor testimony had in this determination.

3. Case Study: The Darfur Genocide, Introduction to Context [5 minutes, option to extend to 15 minutes]

- Introduce the conflict to your students: You have three options here, chose which is most appropriate for your students and timing.
 - Option 1: Slide 11, Play [“What is Going On in Darfur”](#) (4:25)
 - Option 2: Distribute [“Historical Overview, Darfur Genocide”](#)
 - Option 3: Do both.

4. Primary Source Analysis Stations [20 minutes, option to extend to 40 minutes]

[Options: Depending on your timing and resources, you can choose to set up stations, do a free-flowing gallery walk, share each source via Google Slides, or print handouts as a packet for small group discussion.]

- Introduce Activity: Explain that on September 9, 2004, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell made history when he described the ongoing violence in Darfur, Sudan as a genocide.

Show Slide 12, Play: [“Powell says genocide committed in Darfur”](#) (1:44)

[Optional: If you have more time, you may elect to show Colin Powell’s address to Congress. The [full video is available online here](#) (24:51)]

- Show Slide 13, Explain: It was the first time a sitting member of the US government had invoked the UN Genocide Convention in this way. Prior to the determination, Powell had traveled that summer to Sudan’s capital and to the Darfur region in western Sudan to meet with leaders in the Sudanese government and talk to victims. To make his case to the committee, he presented a research report entitled [“Documenting Atrocities in Darfur”](#).

This publication documents the history of the conflict and includes interviews with **1,136 Darfurian refugees** sheltering across 19 different locations in eastern Chad. For their activity, they are going to take time exploring the information presented in this report and how it was used to support the genocide determination. Encourage them to bring Handout 1 with them as they examine each source.

- Direct students to analyze the following primary sources in a walking gallery (or, you can show and discuss as a class, see slides 14-17):

A: Darfur Refugees Report Numerous Acts of Violence

B: Destroyed Village of Darurja, Sudan

C: Destroyed Villages Reported by Respondents in Refugee Camps in Chad

D: Secretary of State Colin L. Powell Genocide Determination

Each station/handout has a reflection question. You can engage these in multiple ways.

- You can have them reflect on their own, then discuss in small groups or with a partner.
- You can have them write their answers on sticky notes and attach them around the corresponding station.
- You can have them answer these questions as they go through each resource then turn in their answers for their exit ticket.
- You may also, depending on timing, review the answers as a class after completing the activity.

Station A: Darfur Refugees Report	Station B: Destroyed Village of Darurja, Sudan	Station C: Destroyed Villages Reported by Refugees in Chad	Station D: Historic Genocide Determination
In your opinion, which parts of the chart below support Powell's determination of genocide? Which of the categories of violence best align with the acts of genocide noted in the UN Genocide Convention?	How do satellite images and eyewitness testimonies work together to provide evidence for claims of genocide?	How does this infographic support Powell's determination of genocide? How does destruction of villages provide evidence for Powell's claims of genocide?	Why do you think US researchers interviewed so many refugees to make their genocide determination? Why might it be important to prioritize hearing from refugees in the future?

5. Final Reflection (10 minutes)

- Show Slide 18, and introduce a final discussion/reflection prompt: Explain that all the documents they just analyzed were created thanks to survivor testimony. Then emphasize that article I of the Genocide Convention is the promise to prevent and punish the crime of genocide. Lastly, pose the following question:

What responsibility, if any, do we have as global citizens when we learn about genocide but are not directly involved?

To close out class, you can discuss as a group, ask students to write out and turn in a short response, and/or do a turn-and-talk.

Supplemental Resources

California Collaborative for Holocaust and Genocide Education, “Resources for Addressing Hate: A Toolkit for Educators and School District Leaders”: <https://cateacherscollaborative.org/toolkit-resources-for-addressing-hate/>

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