

Rohingya Genocide: Heeding the Warning Signs

Time: 40 - 60 minutes (to keep to a 40-minute time frame, follow prompts to skip sections)

Audience: 9th – 12th grade.

Student Outcomes

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

- Identify at least three warning signs that predated the Rohingya Genocide in survivor and activist Wai Wai Nu's testimony and the genocide timeline.
- Classify each example into broader early-warning patterns (such as discrimination, exclusion, and militarization).
- Explain, in writing or discussion, why recognizing warning signs early matters and describe one realistic action by individuals, governments, or international organizations.

Aligned Standards (California Common Core)

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1**
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2**
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3**
Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text and determine whether earlier events caused later ones.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6**
Compare the point of view of two or more authors regarding the same topic.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8**
Assess the extent to which reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1**
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2**
Determine the central ideas of a source; provide an accurate summary that clarifies relationships among key details and ideas.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3**
Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6**
Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1**
Initiate and participate effectively in collaborative discussions.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4**
Present information and supporting evidence clearly and logically.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.6**
Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4 / L.11-12.4**
Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.6 / L.11-12.6**
Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.

Acknowledgement: This curriculum is a project of the California Teachers Collaborative for Holocaust and Genocide Education, established by the JFCS Holocaust Center, with support from the California Department of Education, Marin County Office of Education, the State of California, and the Diane & Guilford Glazer Foundation.

Overview

This lesson on the Rohingya Genocide in Burma centers on survivor testimony from Wai Wai Nu to help students realize that genocide does not happen overnight. People don't just one day wake up and decide to murder their neighbors. In Burma, also known as Myanmar, the state-sponsored genocide against Rohingya may have begun in 2017, but the road to genocide was paved decades prior.

In this lesson, students are asked to consider the warning signs—early patterns such as discrimination, exclusion, dehumanization, militarization, and movement restrictions—that can signal rising danger for a targeted group. Students will do the following:

1. *Opening and Framing:* Consider how a society can progressively strip certain minorities of their rights over time and how this might allow for more violent action in the future.
2. *Listening to and Engaging with Survivor Testimony:* Hear from Wai Wai Nu, a Rohingya survivor from Burma. In her testimony, she details how her family's rights in Burma were slowly stripped away and how this culminated in genocide.
3. *Activity:* Analyze the warning signs for genocide in Burma and consider what they tell us more broadly about a society's path to genocide.
4. *Reflect:* Consider what can be done to prevent genocide in the future.

Differentiation

Language Arts

- This lesson plan centers on screening testimony from Rohingya Genocide survivor and activist Wai Wai Nu. The [transcript](#) for this testimony, provided through the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, is available in English, Spanish, and French. You can also play the video with English, Spanish, and French subtitles.
- For multilingual learners: allow students to complete Handout 1. "Warning Signs Chart: Wai Wai Nu Testimony" in their home language or in a mix of English and home language where

possible; pair them with a peer for oral processing. You may also find it useful to provide students with the [glossary](#).

Advanced Learners

- This lesson plan provides an abbreviated historical timeline of events for students to scrutinize, but more detailed versions exist online. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) has created an outstanding digital resource to help students learn about the Rohingya Genocide. You may want to encourage or require that students prepare for class by exploring the USHMM's digital exhibit entitled "[Burma's Path to Genocide](#)". Doctors without Borders also has created a [timeline of the Rohingya Genocide](#) that your students may find useful to explore.
- The conclusion of this lesson asks student to consider [risk factors](#) for genocide and what can be done to prevent genocide in the future. For homework, you might ask students to explore the Early Warning Project, a resource created by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum that employs statistical risk assessments to determine the likelihood of future genocides and what can be done to prevent them. As of June 2026, [Burma is ranked number 1](#).

Assessment

- Exit Reflection (written, discussion-based, or submitted response): Students explain why recognizing warning signs early matters and describe one realistic action individuals, governments, or international organizations could have taken before 2017 to help prevent genocide in Burma/Myanmar.

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. You may find it helpful to end class with a debriefing prompt for students to write out/partner share (e.g., "What is one feeling or question you're leaving with?") to support emotional processing. For additional resources on trigger warnings, see "Supplemental Resources."

Materials

- [Handout 1. "Warning Signs Chart: Wai Wai Nu Testimony"](#)
- [Handout 2. "Timeline, Rohingya Genocide"](#)
- [Google Slides](#)

Additional Resources for Educators

- [Glossary, Rohingya Genocide](#)
- [Overview, Rohingya Genocide](#)
- [Handout 3. Genocide Prevention for Students](#)
- [Transcript, Wai Wai Nu Testimony](#)

Lesson:

1. Opening and Framing [12 minutes]

- Show Slide 2. Explain the following to your students: Let's imagine our school starts changing its rules over a couple of years. Not all at once, but little by little:

Year 1: Everyone can use all parts of the campus during lunch.

Year 2: A new rule says students in certain grades must stay in one area during lunch.

Year 3: Another rule says those same students also need special permission to join clubs or teams.

Year 4: Now those students can't be in certain hallways without a pass, even during the time when students are moving between classes.

- Show Slide 3. Ask your students to answer the following questions, first silently in their notebooks (3 minutes) and then pair/share (2 minutes):

1. At what point would you start to feel like something is unfair?
2. When does it go from feeling a little unfair to feeling like a serious problem?
3. If things continue like this, what might happen next?

- Whole class debrief. Ask 2-4 volunteers to share their quick answers to each question.
- Show Slide 4. Explain that in some places, rules and policies also change slowly over time, and they often affect one group more than others. This is the case for the Rohingya people in Burma
- Show Slide 5. Read through the text on the slide:

BURMA

Rakhine State: Center of the Crisis (in Burma)

Rohingya in Burma: Understanding the Crisis

- 1 Who are the Rohingya?**
A predominately Muslim ethnic group
- 2 Where do they live?**
Rakhine State
Rohingya have lived in Rakhine State for centuries.
- 3 Refined Timeline**
1982 denied citizenship
2017 Start of genocide
- 4 Global Impact**
Refugee flow to Bangladesh

2. Listening to and Engaging with Survivor Testimony [20 minutes]

- Pre-Testimony Framing (2 minutes):
 - Explain that today, we will hear from Wai Wai Nu, a Rohingya survivor from Burma.
 - Pass out Handout 1: “Warning Sign Chart: Wai Wai Nu Testimony” and read out the instructions on the handout:

“Today we are hearing from Wai Wai Nu, a Rohingya survivor from Burma.¹ As you listen, your job is to notice **warning signs**—early patterns such as discrimination, exclusion, dehumanization, militarization, and movement restrictions that can signal rising danger for a targeted group.”

1. During the video, write down specific events or changes you hear about.
 2. After the video, fill in who was affected and why this is a warning sign.
 3. Try to complete at least three rows.
- Watch Testimony (8 minutes):
 - Show Slide 6 and play video.
 - Complete Handout (5 minutes):
 - Have students either individually, in pairs/small groups, compare what they wrote and complete the handout.
 - Brief whole-class share (5 minutes)
 - Ask groups/student volunteers to share 2-3 examples while you jot them on the board.

**If you only have 40 minutes, skip to step 4.*

3. Warning Signs Timeline and History [12 minutes]

- Pass out Handout 2: “Timeline, Rohingya Genocide”
 - Instruct students to review this abridged timeline. Ask them to mark (star, highlight, underline, etc.) “rule changes” on the timeline.
 - Ask students to answer questions 1-3 on the handout, explicitly referring to specific points in the timeline:

4. Wrap Up/Exit Reflection [5 -10 minutes]

- Show Slide 7. Explain that we started off thinking about how rule changes at a school might evolve overtime to create a very unfair situation for some students. The same thing

¹ Wai Wai Nu, “One Story of Many: Rohingya Testimony,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://www.ushmm.org/cs/genocide-prevention/simon-skjodt-center/criminal-justice-approaches-for-preventing-mass-atrocities/videos/rohingya-testimony>.

happened, but on a bigger scale, in Burma. Considering what you have learned, let's return to the questions we looked at earlier:

1. At what point would you start to feel like something is unfair?
 2. When does it go from feeling a little unfair to feeling like a serious problem?
 3. If things continue to go like this, what do you think will happen if nothing changes?
- To conclude, Show Slide 8 and read the text:

“Genocides are not inevitable. A warning sign represents an opportunity to intervene and change the trajectory.

Even during periods of oppression, people worked to document abuses, advocate for rights, support displaced Rohingya communities, and hold perpetrators accountable. Explain why recognizing warning signs early matters and describe one realistic action that can be taken to prevent future genocides.”

Depending on your timing, have students discussion in small groups, journal, as a class, or turn in their answer as an exit ticket. You may also find it useful to distribute “Handout 3. Genocide Prevention for Students” as an extra resource for students to consider and discuss.

Supplemental Resources

“Burma’s Path to Genocide,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/burmas-path-to-genocide/chapter-1/belonging>

“Burma Ordered to Prevent Genocide Against Rohingya,” Congressional Research Service, 27 January 2020, https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/IN/PDF/IN11215/IN11215.1.pdf.

Erin Rosenberg, “Practical Prevention: How the Genocide Convention’s Obligation to Prevent Applies to Myanmar,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Practical_Prevention_Report_1.pdf

“Global Centre Country Advocacy: Myanmar (Burma),” Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 18 July 2025, <https://www.globalr2p.org/resources/global-centre-country-advocacy-myanmar-burma/>.

Kim Tong-Hyung and Hyung-Jin Kim, “Myanmar, Burma and Why the Different Names Matter,” *AP News*, 2 February 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/myanmar-burma-different-names-explained-8af64e33cf89c565b074eec9cbe22b72>.

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