

# The Armenian Genocide

*A lesson using document-based questions to introduce secondary students to the World War I mass killings of the Armenian people*

Elizabeth Hudson

**Overview:** The Armenian Genocide was the systematic killing of ethnic Armenian Christian people living in the Ottoman Empire during World War I. An estimated one million to 1.5 million Armenians were murdered by shooting, starvation, deportation, exposure and other means from 1915-1916. Armenian children were forcibly removed from their families and forced to convert to Islam.

**Duration of Lesson:** Two 90-minute class periods

**Vocabulary:** Genocide, Armenia, Ottoman Empire, Deportation, World War I, Nationalism

**Previous Knowledge:** Students should be familiar with the geography of the Ottoman Empire in 1915 and the minority Christian populations that lived within its borders, including Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians.

**Recommended Grades:** 9-12

**TEKS:** World Geography and World History (Grades 9-12)

*World Geography:* (18) Culture. The student understands the ways in which cultures change and maintain continuity. The student is expected to: (B) assess causes and effects of conflicts between groups of people, including modern genocides and terrorism;]

*World History:* (21) Citizenship. The student understands the historical development of significant legal and political concepts related to the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. The student is expected to: (D) identify examples of genocide, including the Holocaust and genocide in Armenia...

**Materials:** Computer access, handouts (attached), markers, chart paper

## Lesson Stages:

1. To familiarize students with basic knowledge of the Armenian Geocide, assign the reading to the whole class. If students have laptop access, this NY Times story is available digitally. Otherwise prepare copies, one copy per student.  
[https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/timestopics/topics\\_armeniangenocide.html](https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/timestopics/topics_armeniangenocide.html)  
Alternatively or additionally , the following Youtube video can be viewed by the class.  
<https://youtu.be/LQrXxQ6FN3w>

Once the material has been covered, conduct a class discussion about the basic events of the Armenian Genocide. To check for understanding, review the vocabulary, locate the Ottoman Empire and Armenia on a map, and check that the students understand which populations were Muslim and which were Christian.

<http://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/genocide/ottoman-empire.gif>

2. Divide the class into groups of five. Larger classes may have more than one group per document set, but it is important to keep groups limited to five students. Each will receive a numbered document to read, followed by 4-5 questions. (These pages are included at the end of the lesson stages.) The documents are numbered 1, 2, 3 and 4. Groups will individually read their assigned document, then discuss together what they understand from the reading. Students, again working as a group, will respond to the questions following the reading. One member will write down the responses in complete sentences. (Map: <http://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/genocide/ottoman-empire.gif>)
3. Upon completion of their responses to the questions, the group will craft a 4-6 sentence paragraph, using the information from their document and their responses. The paragraph must incorporate *all of the information* from their responses. Once the paragraph is completed to the full group's approval, it will be transferred in large print using a heavy marker to a sheet of chart paper. The group number must be prominently displayed at the top of the chart. In larger classes, several groups may be working on the same documents, but each group will have its own paragraph response. Chart papers will then be hung around the classroom in numerical order to prepare for a gallery walk.
4. Before beginning the gallery walk, students will need to prepare one sheet of paper, divided in half horizontally and each segment using the front and back numbered 1,2,3 or 4 to correspond to the hanging chart paper.
5. Working in pairs, students will stop to read each of the chart responses. Once they have read the material, they will discuss the aspects of the genocide and the material they have read. Students will carefully take notes but avoid copying the paragraph. Their understanding of the material must be recorded in the notes using their own words and understanding. (Students who wish to work alone should be allowed to do so.)
6. After analyzing the reading at each stop in the gallery walk, students return to their seats and working independently, will study and organize their notes, then write a 3-5 paragraph essay that is an overview of the Armenian Genocide. The essay should include information from all aspects of the genocide that were mentioned in the documents.

**Extension:**

1. To extend the lesson, students working independently or in groups can research other minorities that faced mass killings in the genocide, including Greeks and Assyrians. (See resources)
2. Students might want to follow the history of Armenia after the genocide as it was incorporated into the Soviet Union.
3. Research the diaspora. Where did many of the Armenians resettle after the genocide? (See resources)

**Resources:**

[The Genocide Education Project](#)

[Facing History and Ourselves: The Armenian Genocide](#)

[USHMM Overview of the Armenian Genocide](#)

[The Armenian Genocide \(1915-23\)](#)

[The Armenian Genocide Overview-New York Times](#)

[Statement by President Joe Biden on the Armenian Genocide](#)

[Armenian Genocide: USC Shoah Foundation](#)

[The Assyrians and Greeks](#)

[Armenian Diaspora](#)

## GROUP ONE

### DOCUMENT:

*The Armenian Genocide (1915-1916): In Depth* U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-armenian-genocide-1915-16-in-depth?parent=en%2F11616>

### QUESTIONS:

1. How did the decline of Turkish power in the Ottoman Empire lead to the Genocide?
2. From the point of view of the Ottoman Empire's political leadership, what was the Armenian obstacle to their plan, also referred to as the "Armenian Question"?
3. What event of significance to the genocide occurred on April 24, 1915, and how is it remembered today?
4. How did World War I contribute to the genocide?
5. How was the genocide carried out by the perpetrators?

## GROUP 2

### DOCUMENTS:

Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, Sr.

<https://www.armenian-genocide.org/morgenthau.html>

[https://www.armenian-genocide.org/statement\\_morgenthau.html](https://www.armenian-genocide.org/statement_morgenthau.html)

1. Who was Henry Morgenthau, and what was his relationship to the Armenian Genocide?
2. How did Morgenthau describe the situation of the Armenians?
3. Morgenthau compared the plight of the Armenian people to what other events in world history? How did they compare in Morgenthau's opinion?
4. At one point, Morgenthau blamed the German influence for the atrocities against the Armenians. How can this be compared to future actions carried out by the German military, especially in subsequent wars?

## Group 3

Document:

Near East Relief

[http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/online\\_exhibition\\_10.php](http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/online_exhibition_10.php)

1. What was the Near East Relief? How did it begin?
2. How did Near East Relief portray the genocide?
3. What action did the Near East Relief take to alert Americans to the devastation of the Armenians?
4. What was Golden Rule Sunday? How successful was the campaign?
5. In addition to raising funds for the immediate relief of the Armenians, what long-term efforts did the organization establish?

## GROUP 4

### DOCUMENT:

The Armenian Genocide and Acts of Denial

<https://www.humanrightspulse.com/mastercontentblog/the-armenian-genocide-and-acts-of-denial>

To Armenians, Biden's Recognition of the Genocide Means the World

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/04/24/biden-armenian-genocide-turkey/>

1. Why does this Turkish government continue to deny the Armenian Genocide?
2. What are the consequences of denial?
3. How is a nation's identity connected to its history?
4. Explain the US position on the Armenian Genocide before 2021 and the reasons for President Biden's recent actions.

### HITLER QUOTATION

<https://libquotes.com/adolf-hitler/quote/lbf4g2i>

History attributes the above quote to Adolf Hitler in 1939. Why would Hitler be concerned with such a question?

*Elizabeth Hudson is a former journalist, history teacher, and curriculum specialist for the Austin Independent School District. She was awarded a national Armenian Education Award by the Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region for her research and writing about the genocide. Currently she is completing an M.A in Holocaust and Genocide Studies from Gratz College.*