

DECONSTRUCTING GENOCIDE: THE ULTIMATE CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY

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LESSON

Target Audience:

12th Grade College Preparatory
Expository Reading and Writing Course

Time Requirement:

Lesson Time = 2-3 days; Length of
class periods = one (1) 110-minute
block period and one (1) 56-minute
traditional period

Unit Time = 3-4 weeks (January
2010—end of first semester); Length
of class periods = Three (3) 56-minute
periods and one (1) 110-minute block
per week; 4.63 hours per week

Content Standards Addressed:

*California State Standards for
Language Arts*

1. Reading Comprehension 2.0 (Focus on Informational Materials)—
"Students read and understand grade level—appropriate material. They analyze the organizational patterns, arguments, and positions advanced..."
2. Listening and Speaking 1.11—
"Critique a speaker's diction and syntax in relation to the purpose of an oral communication and the influence the words may have on the audience."

Lesson Goal/Concept

Using their knowledge of the eight (8) stages of genocide as identified by genocidewatch.org students will view video clip testimony of ten (10) Jewish Holocaust survivors, identify the stages of genocide that survivors detail in their testimonies, and provide a rationale for how they link the testimonies to the concept of genocide.

This lesson is meant to be one of the culminating activities of part of a larger "Genocide Unit." The entire unit itself will focus on the understanding the Holocaust as it pertained to people of the Jewish faith or people classified as Jewish according to Nazi Germany. After understanding the Holocaust as an example of contemporary genocide, students will be asked to identify other instances of genocide that have occurred/are occurring in the world and deliver an expository speech to inform their classmates of the genocide. Students might also be asked to discuss options for prevention of genocide and/or construct a letter to a political leader presenting their findings.

Student Objectives

- Define genocide using the United Nations (www.un.org) and/or United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (www.ushmm.org) definitions.
- Identify the eight stages of genocide, becoming familiar with the complexity that each step encompasses. Students will define terminology used and discuss the layers that exist within each stage.
- Utilize visual media and oral testimony to illustrate the Holocaust as an example of genocide.

Materials

- *The 8 Stages of Genocide* by Gregory H. Stanton, president, Genocide Watch
- United Nations Article: *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, New York, 9 December 1948
- 10 testimony clips of Holocaust survivors, listed alphabetically in order of presentation (approx. 28 minutes of video testimony total):
 - Dora Abend (3:07)
 - Inge Auerbacher (1:54)
 - Charles Bartfeld (3:32)

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Materials (cont'd)

- Hansi Bodenheim (1:39)
 - Israel Eisenberg (1:08)
 - Rachel Hanan (1:40)
 - Heinz Skyte (5:02)
 - Tikva Slomovic (3:00)
 - Morris Venezia (2:45)
 - Leon Wells (4:17)
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- Holocaust Survivor Biographical Sketch Sheet handout
 - Holocaust Survivor Testimony Graphic Organizer

Context

This entire lesson is meant to evoke a personal connection and collective responsibility between students and the often “abstract” concept of genocide, as well as connect students to survivors of the Holocaust. The lesson also illuminates the power of oral testimony. Students are frequently presented with written material and asked to analyze its content. Now students will be asked to analyze another medium of how information is delivered in our society. Utilizing video testimony is essential to Holocaust education: first, eventually video testimony will be needed to compensate for oral testimony when there are no longer survivors around to directly listen to, and second, students and society in general tend to make connections visually and auditorially. Often, these connections are more quickly and deeply made with testimony rather than historical, nonfiction documentation.

Clips will be contextualized by the background information given on each stage of genocide and organized according to stages:

Classification—Skyte
Symbolization—Auerbacher
Dehumanization—Bodenheim
Organization—Bartfeld
Preparation—Abend and Slomovic
Extermination—Eisenberg and Hanan
Denial—Venezia and Wells

Before the viewing of clips, students will be given a brief biographical profile sheet of the survivors about to speak. Students will not be given complete transcripts of each testimony, as they will be asked to note keywords they hear from the testimony on their graphic organizers.

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Pre-Viewing Focus

As a “warm-up” activity to viewing the video testimony clips, students will be asked to reflect on the power of “images” in a “Writing Minute” activity. Students can be asked in general to think of an image that has been powerful in/to their lives and detail why this image has had such a great effect on them. Students could also be asked to pick a specific image that they associate with the topic of genocide or with the Holocaust specifically and detail why they recall this image as opposed to others. This could lead into a whole discussion regarding how the “human” component of the Holocaust is often difficult to understand because we are generally presented with graphic images to scar/scare us.

Viewing Focus

While students are viewing the clips, they will be asked to complete a graphic organizer, tracking the various oral testimonies. The graphic organizer will ask students to list pertinent background information, keywords, concepts, or memories that are discussed in the excerpt for each survivor. In addition, the students will be asked to assess the testimony they heard and assign it to a stage from the 8 Stages of Genocide list and explain the rationale for their decision.

Post-Viewing Focus/Assessment/Closure

After the graphic organizer has been completed, myriad activities may be selected from to assess students’ understanding of the concept of genocide. Students could be asked to participate in Chapman University’s Holocaust Art and Writing Contest. Prompts for the annual contest are distributed in the fall each year, and the contest submission deadline is usually the following February. The contest has required students to view an oral testimony in its entirety the past few years, so this might be a natural transition for a unit based around testimony. Another option is to have students create a multimedia presentation that researches how another atrocity can be taken through the eight stages identified by genocidewatch.org. If this option is selected, it is recommended that students complete the multimedia presentation in groups and individually compose a persuasive letter pertaining to the topic of genocide as a culminating activity. This letter should go through the stages of the writing process: prewriting, formulating a thesis, composing a draft, organizing, editing, revising, etc., before being submitted/mailed to a politician. A third option would be to have students write an in-class (45-minute timed writing) expository essay that asks students to discuss/evaluate the impact of genocide in society, supporting their position with reasons and examples from their own experiences, observations, texts, and/or video testimonies.

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Suggested Reading/Supplementary Materials for entire Genocide Unit

- USHMM Article: [*Defining the Enemy*](#); USHMM Encyclopedia Article: [*Anti-Jewish Legislation in Prewar Germany*](#); and USHMM Encyclopedia Article: [*Boycott of Jewish Businesses*](#) to focus on the first 5 stages of genocide: classification, symbolization, dehumanization, organization, and polarization.
- USHMM Encyclopedia Article: [*Ghettos*](#) to focus on stage 6: preparation.
- USHMM Encyclopedia Article: [*Wannsee Conference and the “Final Solution”*](#) and USHMM Encyclopedia Article: [*Killing Centers Overview*](#) to focus on stage 7: extermination.
- Excerpt from Elie Wiesel’s *Night* from <http://www.ushmm.org> to explain death marches, and USHMM Encyclopedia Article: [*Combating Holocaust Denial: Origins of Holocaust Denial*](#) to focus on stage 8: denial.
- Surveying the Text Questions, First Reading Questions, and Second Reading Questions for the aforementioned texts.