



★

**GREAT WAR, FLAWED PEACE,  
AND THE LASTING LEGACY  
OF WORLD WAR I**

★



THE UNITED STATES  
WORLD WAR ONE  
CENTENNIAL COMMISSION

PRITZKER  
MILITARY  
FOUNDATION

NHD  
NATIONAL  
HISTORY DAY

# WHAT IS GENOCIDE?: ANALYZING THE ARMENIAN MASSACRES OF WORLD WAR I



**GUIDING QUESTION:** Can the massacres of Armenians by the Turks during World War I be classified as genocide?

## AUTHOR

Ann Jackson  
B.R. Miller Middle School  
Marshalltown, Iowa

## WHY?

The Armenian genocide connects directly with many issues in the twenty-first century: U.S.-Middle-East relations, NATO, Holocaust, Islamophobia, to name just a few. This topic is rich with opportunities for educators to help their students make important connections between the present and the past and realize the interconnectedness of people, places, and events throughout history.

## OVERVIEW

Students will examine the United Nations' definition of genocide. Students will then analyze primary source documents and photographs from World War I to determine if the massacres of Armenians by Turks should be formally recognized as genocide. Finally, using Flipgrid technology, students will defend their position and respond to other students' ideas.

## OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to

- > Define genocide;
- > Describe the Armenian massacres during World War I; and
- > Explain and defend their position on whether or not the Armenian massacres were genocide.

## STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

### CONNECTIONS TO COMMON CORE

- > CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
- > CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

## DOCUMENTS USED

### PRIMARY SOURCES

1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (excerpt)  
<https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%2078/volume-78-i-1021-english.pdf>

"800,000 Armenians Counted Destroyed," October 7, 1915  
*New York Times*  
<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1915/10/07/105041824.pdf>

Memorandum by the Committee of Union and Progress outlining the strategy for implementing the Armenian Genocide, 1914-1915  
Armenian National Institute  
<https://www.armenian-genocide.org/br-cup-memo-text.html>

Henry Morgenthau, Telegram to U.S. Secretary of State, July 16, 1915  
Armenian National Institute  
<https://www.armenian-genocide.org/us-7-16-15.html>

Photograph Collection, Armin T. Wegner, Armenian Deportees, 1915-1916  
Wegner Collection, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach & United States Holocaust Memorial Museum  
[https://www.armenian-genocide.org/photo\\_wegner.html#photo\\_collection](https://www.armenian-genocide.org/photo_wegner.html#photo_collection)

## SECONDARY SOURCES

Map, *Eurasia 1914*

United States Military Academy at West Point

[https://westpoint.edu/sites/default/files/inline-images/academics/academic\\_departments/history/WWI/WWOne42.jpg](https://westpoint.edu/sites/default/files/inline-images/academics/academic_departments/history/WWI/WWOne42.jpg)

Photograph Analysis Worksheet

National Archives and Records Administration

[https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/photo\\_analysis\\_worksheet.pdf](https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet.pdf)

Written Document Analysis Worksheet

National Archives and Records Administration

[https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/written\\_document\\_analysis\\_worksheet.pdf](https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/written_document_analysis_worksheet.pdf)

## MATERIALS

- > Written Document Analysis Worksheet
- > Photograph Analysis Worksheet
- > Flipgrid Assessment Handout
- > Sticky Notes
- > Computer access for each student

## ACTIVITY PREPARATION

- > Divide students into four groups.
- > Print copies of the four primary sources so each group has one source to analyze.
- > Print copies of the Written Document Analysis Worksheet and Photograph Analysis Worksheet to accompany the primary sources.
- > Set up classroom technology and test all online resources before class.
- > Create a class flipgrid at [www.flipgrid.com](http://www.flipgrid.com).

## PROCEDURE

### ACTIVITY ONE: DEFINING GENOCIDE (15 MINUTES)

- > Write “What is genocide?” on the board. Ask students to write what they know about genocides on sticky notes.
  - » As students write, prompt them to include answers to questions like these: *What is your definition of genocide? Can you list examples of genocide? Who were the people involved in genocides? What were their motives?* All students should be able to contribute, even if they have not learned a formal definition of genocide.
- > Instruct the students to post their sticky notes on the whiteboard.
- > Read some sticky notes aloud and lead a brief class discussion. Possible questions:
  - » *What are some generalizations we can make from these sticky notes?*
  - » *What do the victims of genocide have in common?*

- » *What do the perpetrators of genocide have in common?*
  - » *Where do children fit in with regard to genocide?*
  - » *Who decides what makes genocide versus mass murder?*
  - » *Is all war genocide? Why or why not?*
- > Lead the students to develop a class definition of genocide.

### ACTIVITY TWO: THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE (30 MINUTES)

- > Project the United Nations’ (UN) definition of genocide from the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. Compare and contrast the class definition with the UN’s definition.
  - » *What are similarities of our definition and the United Nations’ definition? What did we leave out? Is what we left out critical to the meaning of ‘genocide’? Did we have anything ‘extra’?*
- > Explain to students, *The United Nations’ definition was created in 1948 after World War II and the events of the Holocaust. Now that we have an understanding of the United Nations’ definition of genocide, we’re going to determine if massacres that occurred in modern-day Turkey during World War I were genocide.*
  - » **Teacher Tip:** Adapt the following background information for your students depending on the amount of knowledge they have in the Russian-Ottoman front of World War I. A Background Information Sheet is provided for teacher or student use.
- > Display the map (Eurasia, 1914) of the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Say, *First, let’s find where what is now modern-day Turkey was on the World War I map. Was it a member of the Central Powers or the Allies? Was it geographically close to its enemy? What countries might attack what is now modern-day Turkey? And from what directions?*
- > Tell students, *Most of the population of the Ottoman Empire during this time was Muslim, but there were some Armenian Christians who lived in the area as well. Because Armenians lived along the Russian-Ottoman front, both Russians and Ottomans attempted to recruit the local Christians into their armies. The massacre we will discuss today followed the defeat of the Young Turks by the Russians at the Battle of Sarikamis in January 1915. The Young Turk government blamed the defeat on perceived Armenian sabotage. The massacres that we are going to look at today were committed by a group called the Young Turks against the Armenian Christians.*
- > Ask, *What is the best way to understand the causes and effects of these massacres? What information do we need? What documents should we use?*
- > Remind students of the importance of primary source documents as resources when analyzing historical events.
- > Divide students into four equal groups.
- > Distribute one primary source to each group along with the appropriate analysis guide (photograph or written).
- > Instruct students to examine their primary source and complete the Analysis Guide.
- > Allow students time to discuss their thoughts within their groups and then select a spokesperson who will share their source with the class.

## ASSESSMENT

- > Assign students to engage in a [flipgrid.com](https://flipgrid.com) discussion. Each student should answer one of the following questions:
  - » *Based on the United Nations' definition, was what happened in Armenia genocide? Why or why not?*
  - » *If you think that it was not genocide, what part of the UN definition did not fit? Explain.*
- > After students complete their flipgrid post, they should watch and respond to at least three other classmates' videos.
  - » **Teacher Tip:** If students do not have computer access, they can answer either of the questions above by writing a paragraph on a piece of paper and then exchanging their papers with classmates and responding in writing.
- > The Flipgrid Assessment Handout can be used to assess the flipgrid postings.

## METHODS FOR EXTENSION

- > Students with more interest can research which nations' governments have formally identified the massacres as genocide and why they have chosen to make a formal declaration.
- > Students can examine the United States' relationship with Turkey and its importance during the Persian Gulf War and Operation Iraqi Freedom.
- > Students who feel strongly that the Armenian massacres were genocide can write to their members of Congress to campaign for a formal declaration by the United States government.
- > Students who are interested in art can also research the use of facial tattoos by the Turks as a means of Islamification. Students can examine the designs and compare and contrast them to other groups of people who use tattooing as a way to create group identity.

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET

## BEFORE WORLD WAR I

- > For centuries the area which is now present-day eastern Turkey was inhabited by Christian Armenians who shared the area with Muslim Kurds.
- > Prior to World War I, Armenians and Turks coexisted in the same geographical area. However, tensions between the two groups arose over issues of religion, economics, and loyalty to the nation-state.

## TENSIONS DEVELOP

- > At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were about 2.5 million Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire.
- > As the Ottoman Empire began to crumble, tensions grew between the two groups. Armenians protested for civil reforms in government and demanded an end to the seizure of land by the Turk officials. Fearing a loss of power, Turks sought to end the protests, resulting in the Armenian Massacres of 1894-1896.
- > In 1908, a small group of Ottoman revolutionaries known as the Committee of Union and Progress, or "Young Turks" came to power.
- > The Young Turks were suspicious of Armenians living in the empire, who they imagined were collaborating with foreign powers. This perception manifested in anti-Armenian violence several times.

## WORLD WAR I ERUPTS

- > The Young Turks joined the Central Powers. Because Armenians lived along the Russian-Ottoman front, both Russians and Ottomans attempted to recruit the local Christians into their armies.
- > In January 1915 the Turks suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of the Russians at the Battle of Sarikamış. The Young Turk government blamed the defeat on perceived Armenian sabotage.
- > The Young Turks sought to minimize any further Armenian actions. The Armenian troops were disarmed and transferred to labor camps, Armenian intellectuals were arrested, and Armenian civilians were removed from their homes and marched through the Eastern Anatolia toward desert concentration camps. Irregular Turkish forces even carried out mass killings in Armenian villages near the Russian border throughout summer and autumn of 1915.
- > Following World War I, a new Turkish leader, Mustafa Kemal Pasha (Atatürk) rose to power and declared the Republic of Turkey. The new government often restricted the rights of Armenians living in the area.

## RESIDUAL EFFECTS

- > Tensions surrounding the acts of 1915 continued to cause a divide between the two groups as well. Armenians contend that the campaign was a deliberate attempt to destroy the Armenian people and, thus, an act of genocide. The Turkish government has declined to recognize it as such, contending that there was no governmental policy of extermination implemented against the Armenian people.

**MAP, EURASIA 1914**  
 UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY AT WEST POINT



**MEMORANDUM BY THE COMMITTEE OF UNION AND PROGRESS OUTLINING THE STRATEGY  
FOR IMPLEMENTING THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE, 1914-1915  
ARMENIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE**

MEMORANDUM OF THE "TEN COMMANDMENTS" OF THE COMMITTEE OF UNION AND PROGRESS.

---

Just before Christmas, I was approached confidentially by someone who stated that there was still in the Direction of Public Security, Constantinople, an official who has been in the Minister of the Interior's Department during the whole of the war, and who had charge of the archives relating to the secret measures and orders issued by the Minister of the Interior as a result of the decisions taken by the Committee of Union and Progress. He said that just before the Armistice, officials had been going to the archives department at night and making a clean sweep of most of the documents, but that the original draft of the orders relating to the Armenian massacres had been saved and could probably be procured by us through him on payment of Ltq. £10,000 paper money. He pledged me to secrecy if I went any further in the matter.

In the course of the next few weeks, I followed the matter up. The man who stole or rescued this draft copy is to-day an official in the Direction of Public Security. I persuaded him without any great difficulty that it would be in his own interests to let us have the documents without payment, and that if in the future he gets into trouble, we would protect him.

There are four documents in this dossier. The first is what is called the "Ten Commandments" and is by far the most interesting. It is unsigned and is the rough draft, but the handwriting is said to be that of Essad Bey, who was at the time one of the confidential secretaries keeping secret archives in the Ministry of the Interior. The second document which is a decypher of a wire from Ahmed Djemal Pasha in Syria regarding the Armenian expulsion is in the actual handwriting of Ahmet Essad and undoubtedly the handwriting of these two documents numbers 1 and 2 in the original Turkish are of that of one and the same man.

There remains therefore only the arrest of this individual to prove up to the hilt the authenticity of otherwise of the draft "Ten Commandments" document. It is extremely important from the point of view of bringing home their guilt to all those responsible for the Armenian massacres, who directed rather than executed them. My informant states that at the meeting when this draft was drawn up, there were present Talaat Pasha, Dr. Beheddin, Shakir, Dr. Nazim, Ismail Jambolet and Colonel Sefi, sub-Director of the Political Section at the Ministry of War; its date is given as December or January 1914 or 1915.

My informant declares that messengers were sent to the different Vali's in the provinces with instructions to read these orders to them and then return the originals which were to be destroyed. Analysis of the documents the "Ten Commandments" numbers 3 and 4 shows that in order to economize their forces, the Turks distinguished between places where they could rely on the population to go ahead with the massacres almost unaided, and other localities where they felt it required the presence of the military in case the population did not show sufficient zeal.

**MEMORANDUM BY THE COMMITTEE OF UNION AND PROGRESS OUTLINING THE STRATEGY  
FOR IMPLEMENTING THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE, 1914-1915 (CON'T)  
ARMENIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE**

VERBATIM TRANSLATION.

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO COMITÉ UNION AND PROGRES ORGANIZATION IN THE ARMENIAN MASSACRES.

---

1. The 10 commandments of the COMITÉ UNION AND PROGRES.

(1). Profiting by Arts: 3 and 4 of Comité Union and Progres, close all Armenian Societies, and arrest all who worked against Government at any time among them and send them into the provinces such as Bagdad or Mosul, and wipe them out either on the road or there.

(2). Collect arms.

(3). Excite Moslem opinion by suitable and special means, in places as Van, Erzeroum, Adana, where as a point of fact the Armenians have already won the hatred of the Moslems, provoke organised massacres as the Russians did at Baku.

(4). Leave all executive to the people in the provinces such as Erzeroum, Van, Mumuret ul Aziz, and Bitlis, and use Military disciplinary forces (i.e. Gendarmerie) ostensibly to stop massacres, while on the contrary in places as Adana, Sivas, Broussa, Ismid and Smyrna actively help the Moslems with military force.

(5). Apply measures to exterminate all males under 50, priests and teachers, leave girls and children to be Islamized.

(6). Carry away the families of all who succeed in escaping and apply measures to cut them off from all connection with their native place.

(7). On the ground that Armenian officials may be spies, expel and drive them out absolutely from every Government department or post.

(8). Kill off in an appropriate manner all Armenians in the Army - this to be left to the military to do.

(9) All action to begin everywhere simultaneously, and thus leave no time for preparation of defensive measures.

(10). Pay attention to the strictly confidential nature of these instructions, which may not go beyond two or three persons.

n.b. Above is verbatim translation - date December 1914 or January 1915.



WSB TELEGRAM RECEIVED. GREEN CIPHER

From Constantinople,  
Dated July 16, 1915,  
Recd. 8:10 A.M.

*Filed*

INDEX BUREAU  
8674016  
9/10/16

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

THIRD ASSISTANT  
JUL 20 1915  
SECRETARY

858, July 16, 1 p m.

~~Confidential.~~ Have you received my  
841? / Deportation of and excesses against  
peaceful Armenians is increasing and from har-  
rowing reports of eye witnesses it appears that  
a campaign of race extermination is in progress  
under a pretext of reprisal against rebellion.

JAN 17 1916

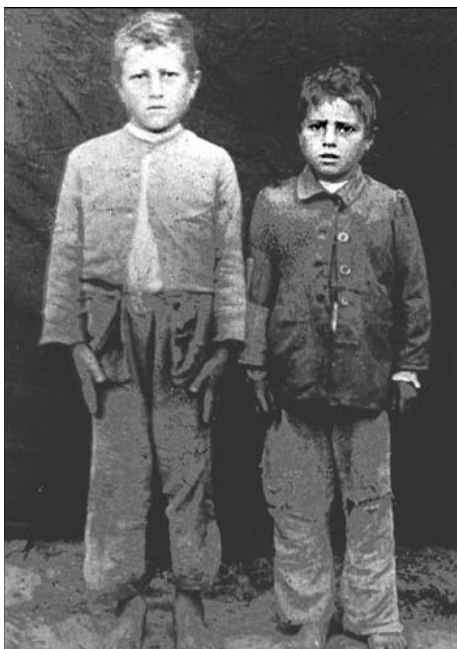
Protests as well as threats are una-  
vailing and probably incite the Ottoman govern-  
ment to more drastic measures as they are deter-  
mined to disclaim responsibility for their  
absolute disregard of capitulations and I be-  
lieve nothing short of actual force which obvi-  
ously United States are not in a position to  
exert would adequately meet the situation. / Sug-  
gest you inform belligerent nations and mission  
boards of this.

Confidential file.

AMERICAN AMBASSADOR,  
Constantinople

Deciphered by

PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, ARMIN T. WEGNER, ARMENIAN DEPORTEES, 1915-1916  
WEGNER COLLECTION, DEUTESCHES LITERATURARCHIV, MARBACH & UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM



## FLIPGRID ASSESSMENT HANDOUT

	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Emerging
<b>Original Post</b>	Student answers question completely, referring to both the class-created and UN definition of genocide in the response. Response cites specific content from multiple primary sources.	Student answers question completely, referring to the class-created OR the UN definition of genocide in the response. Response cites specific content from at least one primary source.	Student answers question, but does not refer to the class-created OR the UN definition of genocide in the response. Response makes general observations from a primary source.	Student answers question, but relies on his or her own opinion instead of evidence from the primary sources.
<b>Responses</b>	Student makes detailed response to three peers. Each response states whether they agree or disagree, cites primary sources in responses, and asks a follow-up question.	Student responds to three peers. Each response states whether they agree or disagree and cites one primary source in response.	Student responds to peers. Each response states whether they agree or disagree without citing a primary source.	Student responds to peers and states whether they agree or disagree, but offers no further explanation.



# THE UNITED STATES WORLD WAR ONE CENTENNIAL COMMISSION



[ww1cc.org](http://ww1cc.org)

FOUNDING SPONSOR  
PRITZKER  
MILITARY  
MUSEUM & LIBRARY

THE STARR FOUNDATION