

## Lesson: Introduction to the Assyrian Genocide

Grade-level: High School

Subject: World History

**Length:** This is designed as a 1-day introduction to the Assyrian genocide, with two suggested lesson plans that could also be combined into two days of instruction. The material can be taught as a stand-alone case study of the Assyrian genocide or taught adjacent to a lesson on the concurrent Armenian genocide to provide a full picture of the scope of Ottoman-led violence.

**Rationale:** Students will understand key events surrounding the Assyrian genocide, including how the Ottoman Empire carried out a policy of genocide against Assyrians living within the Ottoman Empire and Persia during the First World War and the continued impact of these atrocities on the Assyrian population today. The Assyrian genocide is lesser known than the concurrent Armenian genocide, and understanding the experiences of both Armenians and Assyrians provides a fuller understanding of this period.

**Learning Objectives:**

- HS.H1.6: Analyze the relationship among different regional, social, ethnic, and racial groups and explain how these groups' experiences have related to national identities.
- HS.H2.3: Evaluate the short- and long-term impacts of conflicts and their resolutions.
- HS.H4.4: Examine how a diverse society can be a force for unity and/or disunity.

**Essential Questions:**

- What was the Assyrian genocide?
- How and why did the Assyrian genocide happen?
- What happened to Assyrians after the genocide?

**Learning Outcomes:**

At the end of this lesson, students will understand:

- What genocide is and when it became international law.
- How the Ottoman Empire carried out a genocide against Assyrians in both the Ottoman Empire and Persia.
- The immediate and long-term impact of the genocide on Assyrians.
- Why these atrocities are understood to be genocide, even though the word did not yet exist when they took place

Students will also gain experience conducting analysis of oral histories and/or archival documents.

**Teacher Preparation:**

See 'Teacher Resources' document

## Sample Lesson Plan 1: Teaching With Testimony

### Student Materials:

- 'Assyrian Genocide Timeline'
- 'A Brief Overview of the Assyrian Genocide'
- 'Key Terms'
- Personal Histories
- Optional: Oral History Video Excerpts

### Lesson plan:

- Personal Testimonies:
  - Share written testimony with students (and, if appropriate, optional oral history video clips)
  - Student discussion (as a class or in groups):
    - What is being described?
    - What happened to their family during these events?
    - What happened to their family after?
    - What could have caused this?
    - Why might the descendants of genocide survivors be sharing these stories?
- Defining Genocide:
  - Students are reminded that when these atrocities occurred, the concept of genocide had not yet been created. These atrocities were referred to as the Seyfo, annihilation, race murder, massacres, slaughter, and other terms. Students are provided with a definition of genocide (the UN genocide convention definition is recommended).
  - Students discuss the meaning of this definition
  - Students discuss if anything shared in the personal histories sounds like what is described here
- Class Lesson:
  - Teacher provides students with material handouts (timeline, key terms, and brief overview of the genocide)
  - Teacher asks students what they know about the Assyrian population; and shares information to situate Assyrians in the Ottoman Empire
  - Teacher asks students to discuss the key terms, providing supplemental information on key events (optional - using slides with maps and images)
- Individual reflection and discussion:
  - Students write a reflection comparing how the Assyrian (and Armenian, if already studied) experiences during WWI fit with our understanding of genocide, drawing on testimonies and written materials
  - Students discuss their thoughts in groups or as a class

- Group discussion:
  - The text of AZ HCR 2044, which recognizes the Assyrian genocide within the State of Arizona, is shared with students
  - Working in groups, ask students to discuss the text of the resolution: What historical evidence does it share? What action does it encourage? What is the importance of resolutions like this?

## Sample Lesson Plan 2: Teaching with Archival Documents

### Student Materials:

- 'Assyrian Genocide Timeline'
- 'A Brief Overview of the Assyrian Genocide'
- 'Key Terms'
- 'Article analysis'
- NYT Articles on the Assyrian Genocide document (if not conducting own database research)

### Lesson plan:

- Class Lesson:
  - Teacher provides students with material handouts (brief overview of the genocide, key terms, timeline)
  - Teacher asks students what they know about the Assyrian population; and shares information to situate Assyrians in the Ottoman Empire
  - Teacher asks students to discuss the key terms, providing supplemental information on key events (optional - using slides with maps and images)
  - (If using both lesson plans, teachers will have already done this)
- Article analysis:
  - If students are using the provided document of *New York Times* articles:
    - Provide students with the article analysis worksheets and articles from the Selected NYT Articles (teachers may also wish to divide articles amongst groups).
    - Students individually complete an article analysis worksheet for each of the articles assigned to them.
  - If students can conduct their own research and have access to a newspaper database:
    - Direct students to the database to which they have access (for example, *the New York Times* archive)
    - Discuss with students how to conduct a search for material from the relevant time period (suggested parameters are dates of 1914 to 1919) and discuss keyword strategies
      - For example, 'Assyrian Genocide' should not turn up any results; instead, Assy\* could capture Assyro-Chaldean, Assyria, Assyrian, Assyrians; students may also wish to search by sectarian identities (Nestorian, Chaldean, Syriac, Church of the East) to see if

additional articles are found, by key names (Shimun, Agha Petros), or by a combination of 'Christians' and geographic location (Persian Christians, Ottoman Christians)

- Students carry out their own searches to find a pre-assigned number of articles
    - If incorporating this lesson alongside the Armenian genocide, instructors may also wish to have students search for information on the Armenian genocide
  - Students complete an article analysis for each of their articles
- Group discussion:
    - Using student learning materials, students examine where their articles fit, geographically and chronologically, within the historical narrative of the Assyrian genocide.
    - Students discuss their article analyses.
  - Class discussion:
    - Groups share the highlights of their article analyses with the class
    - Students discuss what research parameters worked well or did not work
    - Students discuss potential challenges of conducting research during this period (for example, the absence of a single word like genocide to describe events, translation issues, multiple spellings of locations, multiple ways Assyrians are identified, and misidentifying Assyrians as members of other groups).
    - If also researching the Armenian genocide, students might also discuss what factors contributed to the Armenian genocide receiving more media coverage.
  - Individual reflection:
    - Students write a concluding reflection explaining what they understand about the genocide and exploring what impact it had on the Assyrian community.
    - Students share their reflections in groups or as a class.