

Assyrian Genocide: Key Terms
Student Handout

Assyrians	Assyrians are a distinct ethnic group whose homeland spans the current countries of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Assyrians trace their heritage to the ancient Assyrian Empire and speak Aramaic (also called Assyrian, Syriac, and Sureth). Assyrians are traditionally Christian and have founded several churches throughout their history, including the Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Syriac Catholic Church, and the Syriac Orthodox Church. Some Assyrians identify as Chaldean or Syriac.
Assyrian Genocide	The systemic murder and deportation of Assyrians throughout the Ottoman Empire and Persia was committed by the Ottoman Empire beginning in 1914. An estimated 250,000 Assyrians were killed, and witnesses estimated up to half of the Assyrian population died during this period due to murder, disease, starvation, and exposure. This genocide took place at the same time as the Ottoman genocides of Armenians and Pontic Greeks. As the word genocide did not yet exist, Assyrians initially used such terms as <i>ferman</i> [decree], <i>nakabat</i> [catastrophe], or <i>qaflet</i> [flight] and eventually referred to these atrocities as the <i>Seyfo</i> or <i>Sayfo</i> (sword).
Young Turks	A Turkish nationalist movement within the Ottoman Empire that came to power following the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. Although they first established a constitutional monarchy, by 1913, three figures, Talaat Pasha, Cemal Pasha, and Enver Pasha, effectively seized power and later were responsible for carrying out genocide against Assyrians, Armenians, and Pontic Greeks.
Hakkari	A portion of the Assyrian homeland in eastern Turkey (then-Ottoman Empire) near present-day Iraq and Iran. Although it is a mountainous region, Assyrians living in Hakkari were amongst those most targeted in the genocide. Survivors fled to Persia or Russia. Most Assyrians were banned from returning to Hakkari after the genocide.

Urmia	A region in northwest Persia (present-day Iran) between Lake Urmia and the Ottoman Empire (present-day Turkey) that comprises a portion of the Assyrian homeland. Although Assyrians living in Urmia were not part of the Ottoman Empire, Assyrians here were amongst the first genocide victims. Russian and Assyrian forces were able to push back the Ottomans, but the population again fell victim to violent attacks after Russia left the war effort in 1917. Most of the surviving population fled to Russia, Iraq, or elsewhere in Persia.
Baqubah Camp	A refugee camp established by Great Britain during WWI near Baghdad, Iraq, to provide shelter and humanitarian aid for approximately 40,000 Assyrian and Armenian genocide survivors, largely from Hakkari and Urmia. After the camp closed, most survivors remained in what would become Iraq.
Simmel (or Simele) Massacres	The August 1933 massacres of Assyrian civilians in northern Iraq by the Iraqi military. Iraq gained its independence from Britain in 1932. An estimated 3,000 to 6,000 Assyrians were killed and over 60 Assyrian villages were destroyed.
Diaspora	A population dispersed from its homeland. Today, as a result of the genocide, Simmel, and continued persecution, more Assyrians live in diaspora than in their homelands.