



LESSON PLAN: WHAT IS THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE?

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, students are challenged by the definition of the term genocide and seek to understand the many ways it can and has been carried out against various victim groups. They will examine the role of Raphael Lemkin in coining the term “genocide” as well as be introduced to four genocides through brief synopses. Students will consider the limitations of individuals, groups, international law, and society as a whole in the prevention of genocide.

- 1** Students learn that they will embark upon a study of genocide, a term that has many facets but can be difficult to define. Students perform a self-examination of their knowledge of genocide by completing the [Learn and Confirm Chart](#).
- 2** Students engage in a think-pair-share with a classmate about their completed [Learn and Confirm Chart](#). As a whole group, the class discusses what they know about genocide and their main questions. The questions are recorded on chart paper and posted for the duration of the unit.
- 3** Students watch the video, [What is Genocide?](#) As they watch, they take notes about the different experiences mentioned and major themes to explore. The entire class discusses these and they are added to the posted chart paper as areas to explore later in the unit.
- 4** Students learn that the term genocide was coined by Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin in 1944. Individually or in small groups, students read the handout, [Axis Rule in Occupied Europe](#). As they review, students annotate the text and record information that helps them to understand the many ways perpetrators may enact genocide on a victim group.
- 5** Students complete a jigsaw activity examining the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, the Cambodian Genocide, and the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda. Students utilize the [Genocide](#) handout, their [Learn and Confirm Chart](#), and the [Axis Rule in Occupied Europe](#) handout to create an explanation for whether and why each of these events should be considered a genocide ([Armenia](#), [Holocaust](#), [Cambodia](#), [Rwanda](#)). Questions to guide this activity include:
 - Who were the victims of the genocide? Who were the perpetrators?
 - What actions taken by the perpetrators demonstrate their intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group?
 - What were the motivations for perpetrators to commit genocide? Was it power? To increase their resources? Another reason?
 - What were the results of those actions? How was the victim group destroyed, in whole or in part?
- 6** Students are introduced to [Ben Ferencz \(bio\)](#). As a class or in small groups, students interact with Ben through [Dimensions in Testimony](#). Students ask Ben some of these sample questions, as well as ones they create on their own:
 - What is genocide?
 - Describe to me the scene you saw when you arrived at the concentration camp.
 - How did you respond to the criticism that there was no need for the Nuremberg trials?
 - Are trials important?
 - What is the role of international law in preventing genocide?



As a summative task, students are challenged to contemplate the efficacy of society and international law in preventing genocide. In pairs, students read the poem, [*When Evil-Doing Comes like Falling Rain*](#), from poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht, and discuss the following questions:

- How does the poem build from the first line to the last? What do you think the significance of that is?
- What does the author want the reader to think, do, and understand after having read this poem?
- How does this poem help us understand the crime of genocide and how individuals, society, and the law have largely failed to prevent it?