



LESSON PLAN: WHAT DO GENOCIDES DESTROY?

INTRODUCTION

This lesson introduces students to the people before they became victims of genocide. It highlights their interests, hopes, dreams, and humanity. This glimpse into their worlds allows students to see them as individuals, creating empathy and deepening understanding of the diversity of life in their respective countries. At the end of the lesson, students begin to examine the chasms that existed in society and the small but meaningful ways in which these groups were vulnerable to ostracization and acts of discrimination.

1 Students learn that victims of genocide do not live their lives in the shadow of the impending catastrophe. They are people with various interests, values, hobbies, and jobs, who seek to live fulfilling lives. They don't know what is to happen in their futures. Students are introduced to two survivors of different genocides, Armenian survivor [Jirayr Zorthian \(bio\)](#) and Tutsi survivor [Live Wesige \(bio\)](#), and watch their testimonies. As they watch the clips, students take notes on the [Life Before Genocide Graphic Organizer](#).

2 In small groups, students read the handout, [Life Before Genocide](#), and complete the [Life Before Genocide Graphic Organizer](#) and discuss the questions at the bottom.

3 Students participate in a whole class discussion, sharing their reflections from the victims and discussing the following questions:

- Why is it important to learn about the lives of victims of genocide before they became victims?
- How can understanding who these people were help us to recognize the magnitude of genocide and the total rupture it causes to victim groups?

4 Students learn that even before genocide occurs, there is often an undercurrent within the respective societies that seeks to ostracize victim groups in small but meaningful ways that helps foment the genocide, including overt and sometimes violent actions.

5 Students learn that a stereotype is "an oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for their individual differences." In small groups, students identify different stereotypes they have observed and experienced. Then, they discuss the following questions:

- Thinking about the examples the group identified, who were the actors in these scenarios? What roles were played by them? How does each actor, including those who chose to do nothing, inflict harm on the victim?
- Why are stereotypes dangerous? What is the connection between the acceptance of stereotypes and prejudice?
- Why do individuals who are perceived as different become targets of ridicule and hatred?

6 Students watch the testimonies of [David Faber \(bio\)](#), [Sara Pol-Lim \(bio\)](#), and [Kizito Kalima \(bio\)](#). As they watch the clips, students take notes on the [Testimony Reflections](#) handout. After viewing the clips, the class discusses the following questions:

- How was each person ostracized? How were the differences, real or imagined, of each person emphasized in order to separate them from the larger group? How did that make them feel?
- How did the actions of others, including neighbors and people in authority, contribute to the isolation of the victims?

- How did the schools, communities, and societies as a whole suffer from the exclusion of the victim groups? What was lost by rejecting them?

7 Students are informed that victims of persecution were often marked to further separate them from larger society. Jews had been marked in different ways over thousands of years, and during the Holocaust, some were forced to wear the Star of David on their clothes. In pairs or triads, students analyze the artwork, [*Yellow, 1962-2006*](#), by Samuel Bak.

- What do you see in the artwork? How does Bak use color and texture to convey his feelings about being forced to wear the Yellow Star?
- What is the tone of the artwork? What are some emotions the artist is conveying?
- Connect this artwork to the testimonies of David, Sara, and Kizito. How does this work of art expand our understanding of the pain felt by groups that are ostracized from their communities?