



Lesson Plan: *Discovering Dominga* **Confronting Genocide**

OBJECTIVES

This lesson will help students:

- Become familiar with several acts of modern genocide
- Understand the political, economic, and cultural factors that lead to genocide
- Gain a sense of the lasting human toll of atrocities
- Consider how individuals and societies heal from genocide
- Practice Internet research skills
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This lesson will be most appropriate for most Social Studies courses, but especially Global Studies or World History and U.S. History. It will also be of interest to those teaching Sociology, Political Science, Peace Studies, Economics, English (especially as example of autobiography), Ethics, and Multicultural Education.

GRADE LEVEL: 9-adult

MATERIALS

1 worksheet for each student (see below)

Internet access (for research)

Videotape of *Discovering Dominga*

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

If research is done outside of class, 2-4 class periods.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The film *Discovering Dominga* recounts one woman's search for her Guatemalan roots, only to discover that, as a child, she witnessed one of the country's most infamous massacres. This lesson uses her story as way to humanize the study of genocide.

Looking at the circumstances surrounding genocide is especially important in the context of the recent U.S. war against Iraq. According to U.S. government officials, the action was taken, at least in part, to free Iraq from the brutal rule of Saddam Hussein, who committed atrocities against Kurds and other Iraqis who opposed him.

No doubt the United States will continue to be faced with decisions about how or whether to intervene in countries where human rights abuses are taking place. By helping students understand the political, economic, and cultural factors that make genocide possible, this lesson can provide students with the background to better assess U.S. foreign policy decisions, and by extension, to improve their ability to act as informed citizens in a democracy.

For additional information on the specific situation depicted in *Discovering Dominga*, and on general human rights issues, see the film's website:
<http://www.pbs.org/pov/discoveringdominga/>

ACTIVITY

1. Write the definition of "genocide" where everyone can see it and make sure that all students understand what the term means.

Genocide is any one of a number of acts aimed at the destruction of all or part of certain groups of people; it is this intent that distinguishes genocide from other crimes against humanity. The term was first used by Rafael Lempkin in 1944 in his book, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, based on a proposal he made a decade earlier. The word is a hybrid consisting of the Greek word "genos", meaning race, nation or tribe, and the Latin suffix, "cide", meaning killing. Source: Amnesty International

Then assign students, either individually or in groups, to research an act of genocide. Their goal is to answer each question on their worksheet.

Assignments might include Jews (by Germans in World War II), Armenians (by the Turks, 1894-96 & 1915-16), Chileans (by the government of Augusto Pinochet, 1973-1990), Cambodians (by the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979), Tutsis (by the Hutus in Rwanda, 1994), Muslims in the Balkans (by Serbs, 1990s), East Timor (by the Indonesian military, 1975-1990s) as well as any other examples linked to your curriculum (e.g., Stalin, Native Americans, etc. – unfortunately, the list of possibilities is extensive). At least three different examples should be represented. You may also wish to require that students examine information on at least one official government site and one non-governmental site for each example.

2. Once students have completed their research, use a class period to compare results. Ask students to make special note of any patterns they observe (e.g., are most victims poor? Are perpetrators a different race, ethnicity, or religion than their victims?). Note any findings that did not match students' expectations. For example, students may expect all victims to be poor, but this is not always the case (e.g., the Jews in Germany). Have students speculate on the reasons for any patterns they find and highlight any factors that seem to emerge as more important than others. End the conversation by talking about how difficult it is for people to kill other people and how victims of genocide are dehumanized in the eyes of their murderers.

3. View and discuss the film *Discovering Dominga*. This will take a full class period. The film is just under an hour long. If needed to save time, you can explain that the subject of the film, Denese Becker, was adopted from Guatemala and raised in Iowa. She married an American, had two children, and then began to want to find details of her past. Then begin your screening about ten minutes into the film with the scene of Denese and husband Blane on the airplane on the way to Guatemala for the first time. Suggestions for discussion questions and more information about Denese/Dominga are available at http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2003/discoveringdominga/resources_guide.html.

4. Have all students research and fill out a worksheet for the genocide in Guatemala. Discuss how what they find compares with their research findings on other incidences of genocide. Also discuss whether or not seeing the film first made the research process feel different. How did seeing Dominga's story personalize or humanize the information in the research documents?

5. Summarize what students have discovered about genocide in the modern world and use the findings about economics, military power, government structures, and prejudice as a frame to look at other topics in your curriculum. End with the assessment described below and/or ask students to discuss what they think their government's response should be to genocide.

EXAMINING GENOCIDE	
COUNTRY OR REGION:	
INFORMATION SOURCES USED	
WHAT WAS THE ECONOMIC SITUATION?	
WHAT WAS THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE AND/OR FORM OF GOVERNMENT?	
WHO WERE THE DIRECT PERPETRATORS? WHAT RACE ETHNICITY, AND/OR RELIGION WERE THEY?	
LIST ANY INDIRECT PERPETRATORS (E.G., FUNDERS, ARMS SUPPLIERS).	
POSITION OF VICTIMS IN SOCIETY, INCLUDING ECONOMIC ROLE, RACE, RELIGION, ETC.	
HOW DID THE GENOCIDE END?	
WERE THE PERPETRATORS BROUGHT TO JUSTICE? IF SO, HOW?	
WAS ANYTHING DONE TO HELP THE FAMILIES OR COMMUNITIES OF VICTIMS? IF SO, WHAT?	

ASSESSMENT

Evaluate students' worksheets for the breadth and accuracy of information they uncover. To ensure that they understand the information on the sheets and were not merely copying facts and figures, ask each student briefly (and orally if time allows) to summarize what they found.

EXTENSIONS

Invite someone from a human rights organization, e.g., Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, or Physicians for Human Rights, to discuss their work and how they deal with the aftermath of atrocities.

Ask students to read the excerpt from Samantha Power's book, [A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide](#) posted on P.O.V.'s website. Discuss the history of how the United States has responded to acts of genocide. If it was not already included in the research students completed on genocide, you may want to have them research the action or position the U.S. took in each of the cases of genocide that they have reviewed.

As a follow-up to viewing *Discovering Dominga*, have students research modern Mayan communities. The research could include an examination of your district's current inclusion of Mayan culture in the curriculum. In most school systems, the Maya are included only in studies of ancient cultures and most students are left with the impression that Mayan people no longer exist.

Compare the experience of the indigenous Mayan Indian population in Guatemala with the experience of Indian tribes in the United States.

Assign students to read *I, Rigobert Menchu*, the autobiography of 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Rigoberto Menchu, a Guatemalan, Mayan human rights activist. Compare her experience with Dominga's story. Note: The book is a challenging read.

Have students write down a list of the basic rights to which they think all human beings are entitled. Then compare their lists to the internationally accepted list, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declarations on human rights:

http://web.amnesty.org/pages/AboutAI_udhr Students might also investigate whether different cultures, religions, and/or nations define human rights differently. Note: You may want to do the first part of this activity is prior to beginning the overall lesson and then follow up with the comparison portion after the lesson has been completed.

Check the United Nations Commission on Human Rights for reports of current atrocities and how the world is responding: <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/2/chr.htm> Additional information is available at www.genocidewatch.org. Ask students what they think the world response should be. How should they respond as individuals? How should the U.S. government respond?

RESOURCES

Starting places for research on human rights:

www.amnesty.org - Amnesty International. The library section of the site also includes a comprehensive definition of genocide and who can be prosecuted according to international law: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGIOR400042000>
www.hrw.org - Human Rights Watch
www.phrusa.org - Physicians for Human Rights
<http://www.genocidewatch.org/> - Includes updates on past genocides as well as reports on current problem areas.
<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/hrcenter.htm> and <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/> - The Human Rights Center and Human Rights Library of the University of Minnesota

Starting points for research on historical genocides:

Armenians - www.armenian_genocide.org or <http://www.cilicia.com/armo10.html>
Balkan Muslims - <http://www.diaspora-net.org/food4thought/genocide.htm> or <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/kosovo1/2001/0907genocide.htm>
Cambodians - <http://www.yale.edu/cgp/>
Chile - <http://www.lakota.clara.net/myths/contrer.html>
East Timor - http://www.geocities.com/ben_saul/EastTimorGenocide.htm or http://www.yale.edu/gsp/east_timor/index.html
Guatemala <http://shr.aas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/default.html> (Report on Guatemala of the U.N. Truth Commission / Commission for Historical Clarification)
Jew in WWII - <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/index.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005143>
Tutsi - <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/>

STANDARDS

Though there are no national standards covering human rights or genocide, this lesson will touch on standards in World History and U.S. History, Eras 8 & 9, as well as Geography (see <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/search.asp>). It also offers practice in research skills.

World History / U.S. History

Standard 38 - Understands reform, revolution, and social change in the world economy of the early 20th century

Standard 41 – Understand the causes and global consequences of World War II

Standard 42 – Understands major global trends from 1900 to the end of World War II

Standard 43 – Understands how post-World War II reconstruction occurred, new international power relations took shape, and colonial empires broke up.

5. Understands reasons for the shift in government in Africa and how Africans responded (e.g., reasons for the replacement of parliamentary-style governments with military regimes and one-party states in much of Africa, how Africans survived and resisted apartheid)

Standard 44 – Understands the search for community, stability, and peace in an interdependent world

Standard 46 – Understands long-term changes and recurring patterns in world history

Geography

Standard 10 – Understands the nature and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics

4. Knows the role culture plays in incidents of cooperation and conflict in the present-day world (e.g., conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1960s, Central Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, states within the former Soviet Union in the 1990s; cooperation such as the religious and linguistic ties between Spain and parts of Latin America; ethnic ties among the Kurds living in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey)