

The Armenian GENOCIDE

Remembrance, Denial, and the Politics of History



Content Area Relevance: World History, Global Issues, Human Geography, World Religions, Comparative Government

Grade Level: Grades 9-12; suggestions for modifications provided throughout the lesson.

Duration: 4 50-60 minute class periods

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Driving Question

- To what extent do the politics of today influence our interpretation and understanding of the past?

Supporting Questions

- What is “genocide” and why is the use of this term so hotly contested among scholars and political leaders?
- How did developments within the Ottoman Empire and the outbreak of World War I in the early 20th century pave the way for the mass deportation and killing of Armenians in Anatolia?
- Why has Turkey consistently rejected assertions of an Armenian genocide and how has this denial complicated diplomatic efforts within NATO and beyond?
- How and to what extent did the actions of the Ottoman government (1915-1922) inspire Adolf Hitler’s “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” two decades later?
- What do the ongoing debates regarding the Armenian genocide reveal about the connection between nationalism and the creation/revision of historical narratives?
- How do contested historical narratives frustrate attempts at truth and reconciliation?

Enduring Understanding

- The history of a nation is carefully crafted and closely guarded. Political leaders have a vested interest in promoting a historical narrative that celebrates the achievements of their nation and inspires patriotism among their people. Historians have a different priority: accuracy. They endeavor to fortify the factual foundation of the historical narrative, making revisions when convincing evidence requires it. These two influencers-- political leaders and historians-- compete and, at times, collaborate as they negotiate the narrative that defines a nation. This reality is especially apparent in the case of the Armenian genocide and Turkey’s adamant refusal to recognize that crimes committed against the Armenian people in the early 20th century constitute genocide. When public officials leverage “evidence” and executive power to fabricate their own politically expedient myths, and their efforts are unchecked-- or worse, assisted-- by scholars, the results can be devastating. The omission of wrongs from the national narrative does not mean that the legacy of those wrongs has been eliminated from the collective memory. In fact, a nation’s unwillingness to confront its brutal past-- be it genocide, slavery, or the like-- more often causes these historical wounds to fester. No nation can effectively extricate itself from the shackles of past wrongs if it is unwilling to confront those wrongs thoughtfully, critically, and honestly.

Overview

This four day unit tackles the topic of the Armenian genocide. More specifically, it investigates the historical circumstances surrounding the mass deportation and killing of Armenians in the early 20th century and the reasons for why this historical development is still debated. Although the great majority of historians and elected officials in Western nations agree that the Armenians were the victims of genocide, Turkish scholars living in Turkey and working at state universities and Turkish officials adamantly reject this interpretation of events. The unit begins with a student analysis of President Biden's 2021 recognition of the Armenian genocide and Turkey's immediate, adamant condemnation of Biden's announcement. Working in small groups, students will read official statements released by the White House and Turkish officials, examine how the use of the term "genocide" has intensified debates between the US and Turkey, and consider how the assertions made by each nation compare with the United Nation's definition of genocide. On Day 2 students will build upon their research from Day 1 by participating in a gallery walk. As they tour the classroom in small groups, they will analyze six images--paintings, political cartoons, posters--that connect the Armenian genocide to other historical events (the Holocaust; the Trail of Tears) and ongoing debates between national leaders. This analysis will be immediately followed by a more thorough investigation into the history of the deportation and killing of Armenians in the early 20th century. On Day 3 the class will piece together--quite literally-- the history of the Armenian genocide, outlining key developments within the Ottoman Empire that led to the mass deportation and murder of Armenians. This outline will prove helpful as students then assemble into small groups to examine primary and secondary sources. Each group will be assigned a unique packet of texts and images that spotlight the policies/actions of the Ottoman Empire and the lived experiences of the Armenian people in the early 20th century. Their research will center on one fundamental question: were the Armenians victims of genocide? On Day 4 the five small groups will present their findings to the class. Following the small group presentations, students will synthesize the information they have learned throughout the four day investigation by composing a long essay response to a prompt. This prompt challenges students to reflect on the historical evidence of an Armenian genocide, the existence of conflicting historical narratives, and the extent to which ongoing debates about the Armenian genocide connect with other controversies in history.

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to define the term "genocide" and evaluate the appropriateness of the term's usage as it relates to Armenians' experiences in Anatolia in the early 20th century.
- Students will be able to explain how contemporary debates between Turkey and the US (and other countries) are connected to the interpretation of historical events.
- Students will be able to describe at least three historical developments that ultimately caused the mass deportation and killing of Armenians from 1915-1922.
- Students will be able to connect the Armenian genocide to at least two other significant historical events (e.g. the forced relocation of Native Americans, the Holocaust, etc.), identifying common causes for the persecution/extermination of a population.
- Students will be able to synthesize information from primary and secondary sources by constructing an essay response that explains how the politics of today have frustrated efforts to develop a critical understanding of the past.

Content Expectations

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3 Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Key Concepts

- *Genocide*
- *Turkish Nationalism*
- *Denialism*

Lesson Handouts/Materials

- [Google Slide Presentation](#) for teacher use
- [Gallery Walk](#) for Day 2 activity
- [Student Handouts](#)
- [Resource Packets for Small Group Investigations](#) for Day 3
- [News Articles](#) to use with essay response for Day 4

Teacher Preparation and Instructional Resources

This unit will be more effective if students already have some familiarity with the Ottoman Empire and the broader historical context of World War I. A general understanding of the term “genocide” and the events of the Holocaust will also prove useful and relevant. Students will need access to the internet in order to complete some activities (Day 1 infographic; Day 3-Packet #4 interactive map). Additionally, students should have some experience working with primary and secondary sources. Note that the unit includes several small group activities; teachers should establish norms for small group interaction before beginning this unit. For ease of use, teachers should have some experience with Google Slides and Google Documents. Note that the texts included in the small group activities are at a 9th/10th grade reading level, but modifications to the texts can be made within Google Docs to make these resources more accessible to students with lower reading levels. Additionally, the resource packets used by students on Day 3 can be slimmed down to include fewer, less complicated texts, if desired. Many of the descriptions and images included in these packets are graphic and disturbing. Teachers should consider the sensitivities and maturity of their students before assigning these texts to small groups. If teachers do not have four days to devote to the close analysis of the Armenian genocide, they can easily adapt any *one* of the several activities included in this unit to challenge their students to think critically about historic events and ongoing political debates.

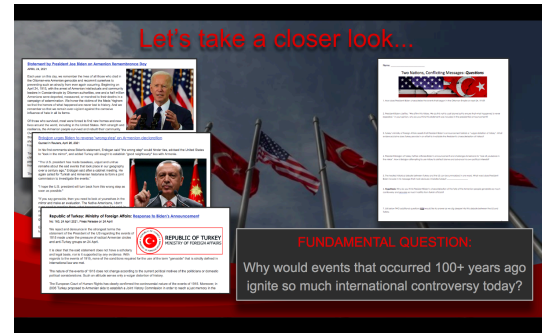
In preparation for the unit, teachers will need to...

- Access and project the [Google Slide Presentation](#) for students to view as a class.
- Print or digitally distribute [Student Handouts](#). Note that the [Infographic](#) assigned on Day 1 can be completed by students on paper or digitally within Google Classroom. The paper copy is included in Student Handouts.
- Print color copies of the [Gallery Walk](#) illustrations and question sheets (6 copies of both question sheets; one set per image). Be sure to label each question sheet at the top with the LETTER of the image students are analyzing.
- Print [Resource Packets](#) (1-2 copies of each packet) for Day 3.
- Print [News Articles](#) or prepare to distribute them digitally to students on Day 4.
- Ensure that students have an electronic device and internet access if teachers opt to distribute texts/assignments digitally..

Day 1: An Introduction to the Historical Dispute

1. **In the news:** Play the short news clip (Slide 2) to introduce students to the topic of the Armenian genocide. After showing the 30 second video clip, facilitate a class discussion using the following questions:
 - *What did President Biden announce on April 24, 2021?*
 - *Why do you think Armenians celebrated the announcement?*
 - *How did Turkey respond to the announcement?*
 - *In your opinion, why is this announcement about an event 100+ years ago so newsworthy?*

2. **Finding answers** (Slide 3): Explain to students that they will now have an opportunity to read the formal announcement prepared by President Biden and the statements published by Turkish officials in response. Divide students into smaller groups (3-4 students each) and distribute to each group the “Two Nations, Conflicting Messages” texts and the corresponding question sheet. As a small group, students should carefully read the statements and use these texts to discuss/answer the assigned questions. Allow students 10-15 minutes to complete this task.

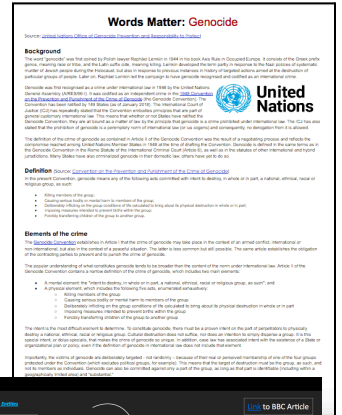


3. **Class debrief** (Slide 4): Invite students to share with the class insights they learned from their small group analysis. Use the following prompts as a guide:

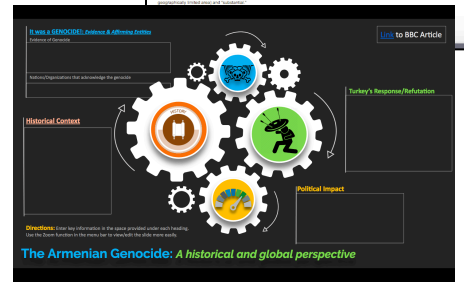
- If an event happened more than a century ago, why are national leaders today STILL arguing over what actually occurred?
- The entire debate seems to center on one word. Explain. (Answer: Genocide)

Collect completed question sheets from small groups following the class discussion.

4. **Words Matter** (Slides 5 & 6): The usage of the term “genocide” is at the center of the debate between Turkey and the US. Note that Biden is the [first president](#) to publicly acknowledge the Armenian genocide, an announcement even his former running mate, Barack Obama, shied away from making during his time in office. Students will now attempt to draft a class definition of “genocide” based on what they know from world history. This task is designed to challenge students to consider how genocide is distinct from other crimes against humanity. Once the class definition is recorded on the board for students, compare their definition with the United Nations’ description ([page 4 of Student Handout](#)). Distribute copies of the UN description to the students. They will need this description as a reference on Day 3 and Day 4 of the unit. Ask students to identify ways in which their class definition is different from the UN’s description. What components did they leave out of their class definition? Project [Slide 6](#) and challenge students to consider why the use of the term “genocide” has caused so much controversy between the US and Turkey.

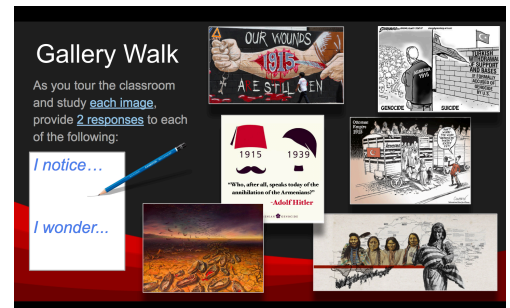


5. **The Back Story** (Slide 7): Now that students have some familiarity with the ongoing debate between Turkey and the US (among others), they will now read “Q & A: The Armenian Genocide Dispute” ([pages 5-6 of Student Handouts](#)). This task will be completed independently in the classroom or as homework. As students read the article, they will complete the [Infographic](#), recording key information within the illustration. The infographic can be assigned to students using Google Classroom, or teachers can opt for the offline version and simply distribute paper copies of the infographic included on [page 7 of the Student Handouts](#). The infographic should be due at the start of class on Day 2. *If students are less familiar with the history of the Ottoman Empire, especially as it relates to the outbreak of World War I, teachers should consider offering their students a brief introduction to the geography of the region (Where is Anatolia? Who are the Armenians? Who were the Ottomans?) before assigning this article to students.*



Day 2: Connecting the Present with the Past

1. **Preparation:** Before students arrive, display throughout the classroom the six images included in the [Gallery Walk](#) packet. Next to each image, display a copy of both question sheets (“I notice”; “I wonder”). Be sure to label these question sheets at the top, indicating which Image (A, B, C, D, E, or F) the students are analyzing while completing each question sheet.



- Gallery Walk** (Slide 9): At the start of class explain to students that they will be doing a “Gallery Walk”, analyzing images that relate to the Armenian genocide and the ongoing political dispute. They will examine these images in small groups as they move around the room. They need to carefully study each image, discuss it with their group members, and then write TWO responses to EACH question sheet displayed next to the six images. Check to make sure students understand the directions. Then divide the class into six groups. Have each group start at an image and then rotate clockwise around the room, spending 3-5 minutes at each station.

Image descriptions below are for teachers’ reference only.

Image A: This political cartoon mocks Turkey’s denial of an Armenian genocide, a denial based on the assertion that the term “genocide” was not established by the UN until 1948, 20 years after the killing of Armenians.

Image B: This political cartoon spotlights threats made by Turkey in response to US recognition of the Armenian genocide; Turkey is a major NATO ally and home to two important US military bases.

Image C: This image posits a common connection between Armenians’ mass deportation into the Syrian desert and Native Americans’ forced removal to “Indian Territory”. Both historical tragedies resulted in a significant loss of life. Note that President Erdogan even referenced a Native American genocide when he instructed the US to “look in the mirror” (passage read by students on Day 1).

Image D: This image posits a connection between the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust. The quote from Hitler alludes to the fact that Turkish officials essentially eliminated a population of people with relative impunity.

Image E: This mural from Los Angeles’ “Little Armenia” neighborhood was painted by artist Arutyun Gozukuchikyan. The mural shows a forearm sliced open by a dagger, the year 1915 exposed beneath the skin. “Our Wounds are Still Open”. The imagery and text reference Turkey’s persistent denial of genocide and the Armenian community’s inability to heal as a result.

Image F: The painting *It Is Devoted To Sacred Memory The Triptych Part 1* by Armenian artist Meruzhan Khachatryan from 2010 shows an artist’s impression of the Syrian death marches during the Armenian genocide

- Class Discussion** (Slide 10): Once every group has completed a tour of the gallery, collect the question sheets from the stations and use students’ comments and questions to lead a class discussion of the images. Invite students to share their observations/questions with the class as you project each image on the front board. Finally, challenge students to identify ways in which these images are interconnected-- some groups have been included in the presentation to guide students, if needed.

Connection 1: Both political cartoons are connected since they both relate to the ongoing debate between the US and Turkey and the contested use of the term “genocide”.

Connection 2: The train car cartoon and the mural of the forearm are connected since they illustrate how Turkey’s denial of a genocide has frustrated the Armenians’ attempts to heal.

Connection 3: The painting of the shoes and the illustration of Native Americans posits a link between the barren landscape of “Indian Territory” (Oklahoma) and the Syrian desert. Both events also resulted in massive death tolls due to forced migrations.

- Historical Background** (Slides 11-12). Explain to students that they will now spend some time investigating the history of the Armenian genocide. Begin this investigation by playing the video produced by the National Geographic Society (Slide 11). Following the video, ask students to share their reactions and questions regarding the survivors’ accounts included in the video. Students will now have an opportunity to read a brief history of the Armenian genocide to get a better understanding of how this tragedy connects with World War I, the Ottoman Empire, and other events they’ve already studied in world history (Slide 12). Distribute to students copies of “A Closer Look: Brief History of the Armenian Genocide” and the corresponding question sheet ([pages 8-12 of Student Handouts](#)). This assignment should be completed independently during the remaining class time or as a homework assignment. The completed question sheet will be due at the start of class on Day 3.

A Closer Look
Brief History of the Armenian Genocide

Source: Source: Social Education 69(5), pg 333-337. ©2008 National Council for the Social Studies. Adapted for The Genocide Education Project.

Who Are the Armenians?

The Armenians are an ancient people who have existed since before the first century C.E. Armenia has gained and lost a tremendous amount of territory throughout its long and turbulent history. Boundaries of the past have extended from that of the present-day Republic of Armenia and through most of present-day Turkey. The word “Armenian” was actually given to the country by the neighbors, probably in Armenian with the “-ian” suffix from the same root, a descendant of Noah from the Bible, and “-ian” would mean “son” or “people.” The Armenian language is unique from other Indo-European languages, with its own distinctive and grammar.

Christianity is a deeply rooted aspect of Armenian history and culture. Armenia was the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion, in 301 C.E. The same Christian identity has greatly influenced Armenian culture, setting it apart from most of its neighbors in the region. The majority of Armenians belong to the Eastern or Western divisions of the Armenian Apostolic Church, an orthodox form of Christianity.

Although Armenia was at times a kingdom, in modern times, Armenia has been an independent country for only a few years. It first gained independence in 1918, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, but the empire when Armenia was invaded by the Red Army and became a Soviet state in 1920. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenia was the first state to declare its independence, and remains an independent republic today. Armenia is a democracy and its borders only include a very small portion of the land that was historic Armenia.

Early Massacres

The Seljuk Turks began to invade Anatolia as early as the eleventh century and by 1453 their descendants, the Ottoman Turks, had conquered Constantinople (now Istanbul), finally establishing the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire was an imperialistic state that incorporated elements of the Islamic world, including the Armenians. The Armenians were taxed, oppressed, and while they were granted some freedoms, including the ability to practice Christianity, they were faced with extra taxes and discrimination when wanting to participate in the justice system, government, and their civil and property rights.

By the mid-1800s, as the idea of constitutionalism spread through Europe, some Armenians began to demand more rights, such as participation from national governments, officials and based taxation.

While most Armenians saw themselves as members of the Ottoman Empire, regional groups of intellectuals protested the discriminatory laws, seeking reform from the government, though not an independent sovereign state.

Day 3: Piecing Together the History

1. **The “Puzzle” of History** (Slides 14 & 15): Challenge students’ spatial intelligence by inviting them to mentally assemble the puzzle pieces displayed on Slide 14. What shape will this puzzle resemble once it’s fully assembled? Reveal Slide 15 and help students consider how historians’ work is similar to assembling an intricate puzzle.

2. **Steps Toward Genocide** (Slides 16 & 17): Distribute the footprint notesheet to students ([page 14 of Student Handouts](#)) Using the footprint puzzle infographic on Slide 16 of the Google Slide presentation, help students identify the key developments that led up to the Armenian genocide. As you reveal each puzzle piece, students should record the information on their notesheet. When students have completed the note sheet, show the video clip included on Slide 17. The video was produced by the [Choices Program](#), and it outlines the broader historical context of the Armenian genocide.

3. **The Evidence of Genocide** (Slide 18). Explain to students that they will now work in small groups, analyzing primary and secondary records that detail the killing of Armenians by Turkish officials. Each packet of resources is unique; no two groups will be assigned the same packet of resources. Students’ will work closely with their group members, analyzing each text/image included in their collection of resources and responding to the questions posed on the cover page of their group’s packet. Once the groups have finished analyzing all of their packet’s documents, they will highlight their findings/conclusions in a Google Slide presentation to be shared with their classmates at the start of Day 4. Emphasize to students that it is their group’s responsibility to summarize accurately the content of their packet’s texts/images. This is especially important since no one else in the class will have seen their group’s documents. Divide students into five groups and distribute a packet of materials to each group. Note that some of the texts and images included in the packets are graphic and disturbing. Be mindful of students’ sensitivities and maturity level. Packets can be easily modified, if needed.

Day 4: Student Presentations & Assessment

1. **Student presentations** (Slides 20-24): Invite each group to share with the class their findings. For greater coherence, presentations should follow the same order as the packet numbers, concluding with a discussion of “denial”. Between presentations, challenge students to make connections from one packet to the next and instruct them to revisit the UN’s definition of genocide. The fundamental question they need to address throughout these presentations is whether or not the evidence included in the packets provides sufficient proof of an Armenian genocide.

Resource Packet 4

The Victims

Testimony from the Armenian Survivors



Directions: *As you closely read the Armenian testimonies, answer the following questions:*

As you closely read the Armenian testimonies, answer the following questions:

- (1) What additional information do you have about the Armenian people?
- (2) To what extent do you agree with the testimonies?
- (3) What additional information do you have about the Armenian people?

Testimony:

- Edward R.
- Sion Abak
- Haig Beshir
- Andreas M.
- Saim Kadir


Images:

- The refugee camps
- Death marches
- Death camps
- Unmarked graves

Resource Packet 4

The Politics of Denial

Governments and Scholars Weigh In



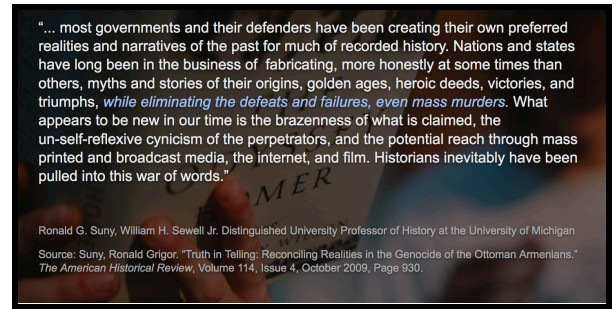
Directions: This collection of excerpts from governmental entities, scholars, and educational resources address Turkey’s refusal to use the term genocide when describing the hardships endured by the Armenian people 1915-1922. As you closely analyze this collection of texts, carefully consider and respond to the following questions:

- (1) Argumentation: How does the Turkish Ministry defend its determination that the Armenians are not the victims of a genocide?
- (2) Move: Given that several scholars and political leaders/entities outside of Turkey recognize an “Armenian genocide”, how to we account for Turkey’s persistent denial? Why does the Turkish government continue to insist that an Armenian genocide never happened?

Testimony:

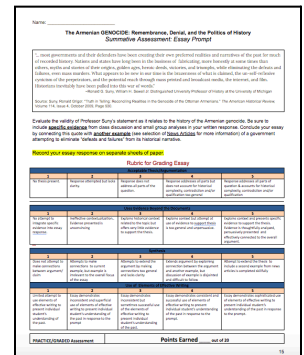
- The Armenian Allegation of Genocide: The issue and the facts
- Denial of Genocide
- Professional Ethics and the Denial of Armenian Genocide
- Moving beyond the black (and dark) spots of history

2. **Remembrance, Denial, & the Politics of History** (Slide 25): Share the quotation from Professor Ronald Suny with students. Allow them time to read the entire statement and process his assertions. Ask students to talk with a partner, summarizing in their own words the essence of Professor Suny's statement (Think-Pair-Share). Invite students to share their thoughts with the class. What does the quote mean to them and how does it relate to the topic of the Armenian Genocide?



CHALLENGE: Challenge students to consider other examples from history/current events that similarly demonstrate this tendency to fabricate history to serve political ends.

3. **Summative Assessment** (Slide 25): Distribute the essay prompt to students ([page 15 of Student Handouts](#)). Clarify the expectations regarding their written response by referencing the rubric included with the essay prompt or by providing students with another rubric to use as a reference. To respond to all components of the prompt, students will need access to the collection of three [News Articles](#). These articles can be shared with students digitally or hard copies can be given to students. Essay responses should be due the next day.



Suggestions for Unit Extensions and Supplemental Resources

Extensions: Teachers can extend this unit to include other topics related to genocide and/or the politicization of history.

- Genocide in the 20th century: Exposing the connections between the [Armenian genocide and the Holocaust](#)
- [Operation Nemesis](#): Armenians' clandestine efforts to locate and assassinate Turkish officials most responsible for coordinating the forced deportation and murder of Armenians in the early 20th century
- The [stages of Genocide](#) as they relate to the [Armenians' experience](#)
- Ongoing efforts to [ban the teaching of critical race theory](#) within the US
- Calls to recognize the [Native American genocide](#)
- The political/diplomatic factors that help explain [Israel's persistent refusal to recognize the Armenian genocide](#)

Additional Online Resources for Teachers & Students

- Video Testimony: Armenian genocide-- [survivors recall events 100 years on](#)
- Facing History and Ourselves: [The Armenian Genocide](#) (resources and lesson plans)
- The Choices Program (Brown University): [Confronting Genocide -- Never Again?](#)
- [The Armenian Genocide Museum](#): An interactive online exhibit
- Teaching with Testimony: [Exploring the Legacy of the Armenian Genocide Virtual Field Trip](#)
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Special Focus-- [The Armenian Genocide](#)

Video Resources for Teachers & Students

- “The Promise” (2016 film) available on Netflix
- Architects of Denial (2017) (Available on Amazon Prime)
- Aghet – Ein Völkermord (2010) (Available on Youtube)
- The Cut (2014) (Available on Amazon Prime and Youtube)
- Grandma's Tattoos (2011) (Available on Youtube)
- Tehlirian on Trial: Armenia's Avenger (Available on Youtube)
- Intent to destroy (2011) (Available on Amazon Prime)
- Armenian Genocide: 90 Years Later (Available at <https://www.pbs.org/video/armenian-genocide-90-years-later/>)
- Ararat (2002) (Available on Youtube)
- 1915: The Movie (2015) (Available on Youtube)
- The Turkish Historical Society, an organization funded by the Turkish state for the purpose of producing material that supports the official narrative, has a documentary series on Youtube in English. The series includes eight episodes that illustrate in detail the Turkish perspective and denialism.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rG2zbHzFSho&t=5s&ab_channel=T%C3%BCrkTarihKurumu