

A Proposal for Teaching a Course on Genocide to High School Students
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I. Justification

Never again. Never again do we wish to see people subjected to the genocidal violence that the world bore witness to during the Holocaust. Six million Jews - roughly a third of all European Jewry at the time - and roughly five million others were brutally and systematically murdered in the name of purifying the German race. In the just over seventy years that have passed since the end of the Holocaust, the international community has taken the stance of “never again” with regards to genocide and other serious crimes against humanity. However, in the decades that have passed since the 1952 UN Convention on the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide, there have been countless genocide yet very few attempts to intervene or effectively address them.

Throughout each of our times at American University, we have each studied various genocides and the impacts that these brutal acts of violence have had on the global community. In conducting our research, though, we have come to realize that the vast majority of our knowledge on genocide came from college experiences. In high school, we only discussed the Holocaust, and even then we discussed it in varying degrees of depth. Our classes for the most part only very briefly touched on the Holocaust, with a strong focus on the American liberation of camps and how that related to the greater picture of US involvement in WWII. At the end of our secondary education, we were walking away with only the most basic understanding of the events and without a clear grasp of why something as horrible as the Holocaust even happened in the first place. In reflecting back on these experiences, we recognize that we were cheated out of a “fuller” education. It is extremely important to discuss these issues with high school students beyond just a simple understanding of the facts because

education is the building blocks of our society. Without a solid foundation from education, how can we expect future generations to be prepared to effectively tackle the world's problems?

When we first discussed taking on this project, we originally planned to write a research paper on the Rwandan Genocide and why it is not taught in high schools. All three of us had done research on the Rwandan Genocide specifically, and we felt comfortable continuing that research in our investigation of why we teach some genocides and not others. As we began to review the literature on the teaching of genocide in secondary education, we decided to switch our project from a research paper to designing a curriculum for teaching the Rwandan Genocide in schools. We realized that while a research paper just highlights a problem that people might already be aware of, a new curriculum would actually begin the work of fixing that problem. Upon further investigation into the current teaching practices on the topic in high schools, we made one final switch to focus on the teaching of genocide in general in schools. We realized that the teaching of genocide is not mandated at a federal level in schools, though some states do mandate it. However, the requirements are not consistent across states, and some states do not provide any standards for how the subject is to be taught. This leads to the vast variety of curricula that we and our peers experienced in high school. Combining this with our passion for understanding genocide as a whole rather than specific unique facts, we have focused our recommended framework on the eight stages of genocide and how different cases apply, so that students might walk away with a more holistic understanding of the issue and the ability to recognize its signs in the future.

In taking on this project, we aim to inspire educators to incorporate genocide into their curricula. This could be done through either the inclusion of a module into an existing curriculum, or through the creation of a whole class curriculum specifically on the topic of

genocide. Our framework is designed with this flexibility in mind: a teacher might choose to pull out specific module ideas and work them into their current curriculum on the same or similar topic, or they can utilize the entire fourteen-week course. Additionally, we hope to collaborate with educators to develop classes specifically on the topic, as we believe that a longer, more in-depth education on genocide is more beneficial than simply a week or two. In order to achieve this, we have begun working with Mr. Tony Macerollo at New Albany High School in New Albany, Ohio. Mr. Macerollo has already begun to develop a semester-long elective class dedicated to teaching high school students about genocide and how to recognize the signs so that we might make “never again” a reality. We are committed to working closely with Mr. Macerollo in order to incorporate aspects of our project into his curriculum design and proposal for the state of Ohio.

II. Current US Teaching Practices: Advocacy, Academia and Application

The incorporation of material on genocide, mass killings and crimes against humanity in high school curricula has been growing in recent years, largely as a result of intensifying efforts by various advocative organizations and academic research. While calls for change regarding the composition of requirements for secondary education are often directed towards legislators, several voices involved in the national discussion surrounding the matter emphasize the problematic nature of this approach. One such individual is Diane Ravitch, author of *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn*, stating that expert opinion in the discipline should lead the development of genocide lesson plans - not legislators, often motivated by mandates and interest groups.¹ It is evident that scholarly research and experimentative case studies conducted by academics have paved the way for reshaping how high school students learn about human rights; however, documentation by teachers themselves who have implemented various methods of teaching these difficult topics provide valuable resources for furthering genocide education.

The National Council for Social Studies, made up of concerned educators across the country, has demonstrated its support for the integration of human rights topics in high school classrooms. Holding annual conferences and creating teacher resources, the organization has highlighted the importance of developing the subject area for widespread inclusion in high school curricula. "It's important for students to realize it's not something that happened once in our history," states NCSS President Gayle Y. Thieman, "but that genocide is an issue that erupts

¹ Rabin@nathanrabin, Nathan. "Diane Ravitch: The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn." The A.V. Club. June 03, 2003. <http://www.avclub.com/review/diane-ravitch-ithe-language-police-how-pressure-gr-5608>.

around the world in situations of intense racial or ethnic conflict.”² The organization’s advocacy has resulted in many social studies teachers incorporating NCSS sample lesson plans on genocide, as well as those created by other civil society organizations, into their own. Published in 2014, its mission statement on *Human Rights Education: A Necessity for Effective Social and Civic Learning* represented the movement that genocide curriculum has been prompted largely by public awareness campaigns that not only advocate, but provide resources for teachers.³

High School teachers seeking out resources to aid them in developing or altering lesson plans focused on presenting other sides of history, namely late 20th century genocides, have expressed the need of balancing “sophisticated understanding and moral engagement.”⁴ The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, which endorses a more traditional instructional approach, stresses a chronological understanding of history and disapproves of replacing the essential content of current history curricula.⁵ And scholars, such as Donvito, have determined that a large number of teachers view materials currently being offered as far too extensive to be applied within the time frame made available to them.⁶ Educators like Susan Roeske at Mountain High School of Stafford County, Virginia, however, are proponents of teaching on genocide whatever the official curricula, despite perceived time constraints. Roeske, who has been teaching for 9+ years, always finds a way to include discussions of human rights into her teaching units, utilizing the Choices for the 21st Century program from Brown University’s Watson Center for

² Glass, Kathy Tuchman. *Lesson design for differentiated instruction, grades 4-9*. Page 71. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2009.

³ "Human Rights Education: A Necessity for Effective Social and Civic Learning." National Council for the Social Studies. http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/human_rights_education_2014.

⁴ Manzo, Bess Keller Kathleen Kennedy. "Genocide Claiming a Larger Place in Middle and High School Lessons." Education Week. May 03, 2016. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007/10/24/09armenian.h27.html>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Sardone, Nancy B., P.H.D. and Roberta Devlin-Scherer. "Exploring Sensitive Subjects with Adolescents: Using Media and Technology to Teach about Genocide." *American Secondary Education* 43, no. 2 (Spring, 2015): 5, <http://proxyau.wrlc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1685878613?accountid=8285>.

International Studies.⁷ This program, providing materials for high school history teachers, emphasizes study of current events, including the tragedy at Darfur.⁸

Adrienne Bock of Lexington High School in Lexington, Massachusetts shares a similar perspective to Roeske, also utilizing the resources made available by existing organizations for pre collegiate teachers. Facing History and Ourselves is a group that emphasizes the inclusion of matters such as identity and moral responsibility in classroom discussions on mass atrocities.⁹ Bock describes the framework as setting the stage for “asking students questions about themselves - who [is] in their ‘universe of obligation,’ who’d they’d stick their necks out for.”¹⁰ This coming together of organizational and individual visions for human rights lesson plans is representational of the fusing of academic research and advocacy groups with real life application in American high schools. Facing History and Ourselves, emphasizing civil engagement, has directed educators towards teaching within the context of human behavior. “It hits [students] in a different place,” describes Bock, “and they really begin to think about the choices they make in everyday life.”¹¹ Scholars have also praised this method, describing it as useful for teachers sensitive to implementing such materials geared towards younger and impressionable audiences.¹² In this regard, the Facing History approach takes into consideration the possibility of students experiencing sensations of helplessness or fatalism in critically thinking about human rights abuses.

⁷ Manzo, Bess Keller Kathleen Kennedy. "Genocide Claiming a Larger Place in Middle and High School Lessons." Education Week. May 03, 2016. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007/10/24/09armenian.h27.html>.

⁸ "Teacher's Corner." Teacher Corner | Brown University. <http://www.choices.edu/teachers-corner/>.

⁹ "Our Work." Facing History and Ourselves. <https://www.facinghistory.org/our-work>.

¹⁰ Manzo, Bess Keller Kathleen Kennedy.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² "Our Impact." Facing History and Ourselves. <https://www.facinghistory.org/our-impact>.

A major talking point in debates over incorporation of units on genocide in high school history courses is the possible negative impact on students' emotional or mental health. It is important to note, however, that these social issues are difficult to discuss in all settings. Therefore, focus must be placed on striking the right balance between aforementioned fatalism and "comfortable exceptionalism," a term coined by Frusetta meaning that students take on the perspective of, "It happened there because that society was flawed, it couldn't happen here."¹³ Genocide, being an inherently complex and tragic occurrence, is naturally going to evoke emotional responses from pupils. Though on the opposite side of the spectrum is the threat of "subtle dehumanization," in which the overwhelming nature of statistics will result in the detachment of victims' humanity within the minds of students.¹⁴ But as described by Ronald Levitsky, a history teacher at Sunset Ride School in Northfield, Illinois, "you want to reach their maturity level...they can handle the concepts and the affect...that's how you reach them - the affect."¹⁵ The question that remains, then, is how to successfully implement healthy, meaningful teachings on genocide, mass killings, and atrocities.

Teaching about human rights is no exception when it comes to the perpetuating debate regarding traditional vs. non-traditional teaching methods. Though, in the subject area of genocide, there is a general consensus that the most effective approach is that which blends traditional tools (lectures, discussion, film, debate, case studies) with media and technology.¹⁶

¹³ Frusetta, J. (2010). Beyond morality: Teaching about ethnic cleansing and genocide. *Perspectives on History*, 39-40. Guided questions for political cartoon analysis. Retrieved from <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/teachers/lessons/lafollette/pdfs/cartoonquestions.pdf>

¹⁴ Totten, S. 1999. The scourge of genocide: Issues facing humanity today and tomorrow. *Social Education* 63 (2): 116-21.

¹⁵ Manzo, Bess Keller Kathleen Kennedy.

¹⁶ Sardone, Nancy B., P.H.D. and Roberta Devlin-Scherer. "Exploring Sensitive Subjects with Adolescents: Using Media and Technology to Teach about Genocide." *American Secondary Education* 43, no. 2 (Spring, 2015): 4-17, <http://proxyau.wrlc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1685878613?accountid=8285>.

The goal of strategically combining forms of classroom activities is to activate higher order thinking, as opposed to utilizing superficial, low level thinking exercises (word scrambles, crossword puzzles) and prioritize critical thinking over basic memorization. It is suggested that educators first present to their students the foundational discussions surrounding defining genocide, a matter still characterized by global disagreement.¹⁷ The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as “any act committed with the idea of destroying in whole or in part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.”¹⁸ Teachers may discuss the dissent within the global community, or the US House of Representatives itself, in declaring mass killings as ‘genocide,’ such as the case of the 1915 Armenian Genocide.¹⁹ In addition to serving as a pre assessment exercise for both educators and students, and initiating critical thinking for pupils, discussing the importance of a definition highlights the impact of language within the realm of human rights and provides a platform for considering all the elements that makeup genocide itself (which is not confined to just killing).²⁰ Academics and teachers alike generally agree upon the necessity of this ‘traditional’ step, promoting group discussion or the use of graphic charts/cluster maps. In his article about teaching on the Former Yugoslavia, Brad Joseph emphasizes the utility of traditional teaching methods in ensuring students attain a general understanding of the scope and context of genocide.²¹ Using such discussions to introduce students to the course also allows the

¹⁷ "How do you define genocide?" BBC News. March 17, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-11108059>.

¹⁸ OHCHR | Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CrimeOfGenocide.aspx>.

¹⁹ Seabrook, Andrea. "Armenian Genocide Debate Creates Partisan Split." NPR. October 14, 2007.
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=15271080>.

²⁰ Totten, Samuel. *Teaching about Genocide: Issues, Approaches, and Resources*. 2004.

²¹ Joseph, Brad. "The Social Studies." Taylor and Francis Online.
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.3200/TSSS.96.3.133-136>.

establishment of contextual language for the following material (ethnic cleansing, concentration camps, expulsion, etc.).

While there is no limit to the ways in which teachers may incorporate the use of media and technology in their classrooms, there are numerous methods that have been emerging in the community of researchers and educators working to normalize the study of genocide and human rights in high school classrooms across the United States. The University of Southern California created a database of 1200 videos presenting first account stories regarding complex human behavior, such as scapegoating. The program further created tools that were geared towards and subsequently used by high school teachers, promoting the presentation of these videos for the purpose of student analysis.²² The use of video footage/films as a teaching resource is not new, but the availability and range of viewing materials available has expanded beyond the staples of Schindler's List and Hotel Rwanda.

²² Sardone, Nancy B., P.H.D. and Roberta Devlin-Scherer. "Exploring Sensitive Subjects with Adolescents: Using Media and Technology to Teach about Genocide." *American Secondary Education* 43, no. 2 (Spring, 2015): 4-17, <http://proxyau.wrlc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1685878613?accountid=8285>.

III. Framework/Conceptual Design

Intro:

The course is designed that the 8 stages of genocide are used to frame different examples of genocide. The first two weeks will introduce the larger topic of genocide, with subsequent weeks focusing on individual stages of genocide. In the first week students will be divided into 4 groups, one for each genocide discussed in the class. During each week students will be given group work time to analyze the week's specific stage in terms of their assigned example of genocide. Following the 8 weeks on the 8 stages of genocide, there will be one week that will focus on strategies for rebuilding societies after genocide. During the last weeks of the course students will work in their groups to prepare a presentation on their topic. They will then give the presentations to the class. Students will also be given time each week to journal about their thoughts on the topic and what they have learned.

Learning Objectives:

1. Create an understanding of genocide not as an isolated event, but as a recurring repression of human rights
2. Identify the warnings, signals, attitudes, and steps that may lead to genocide occurring
3. Investigate individual examples of genocide
4. Explore international responses to genocide
5. Explore the tactics used to rebuild a society post-genocide

Learning Outcomes:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the historical factors that lead to genocide
2. Engage in collaborative group work which will reflect learning about genocide
3. Identify how the 8 stages of genocide occur across examples of genocide

4. Engage in research and writing skills to demonstrate learning

Sample Course Outline:

- 1. Introduction to the Topic (2 weeks)**

- a. Topics Introduced

- i. Definition of genocide
 - ii. Examples of genocide
 1. Holocaust
 2. Khmer Rouge
 3. Rwanda
 4. Bosnia
 - iii. Eight stages of genocide

- b. Suggested Activities

- i. Weekly journaling
 - ii. Group activity on the definition of genocide

- 2. State One: Classification (1 week)**

- a. Topics Introduced

- i. Role that identity plays in genocide
 - ii. “Us vs. them” mentality
 - iii. Actions that combat this step

- b. Suggested Activities

- i. Weekly journaling
 - ii. Reichstag election simulation

- 3. State Two: Symbolization (1 week)**

- a. Topics Introduced
 - i. The way that classification and symbolization are tied together
 - ii. Actions that combat this step
 - b. Suggested Activities
 - i. Weekly journaling
- 4. Stage Three: Dehumanization (1 week)**
- a. Topics Introduced
 - i. How dehumanization can lead to normal human overcoming the normal revulsion to murder
 - ii. Actions that combat this step
 - b. Suggested Activities
 - i. Weekly journaling
- 5. Step Four: Organization (1 week)**
- a. Topics Introduced
 - i. The ways in which genocide is organize
 - ii. Actions that combat this step
 - b. Suggested Activities
 - i. Weekly journaling
- 6. Step Five: Polarization (1 week)**
- a. Topics Introduced
 - i. The role of propaganda in polarization
 - ii. The ways that legislation can lead to polarization
 - b. Suggested Activities

- i. Weekly journaling

7. Step Six: Preparation (1 week)

- a. Topics Introduced
 - i. How victims are identified
 - ii. Actions that combat this step
- b. Suggested Activities
 - i. Weekly journaling

8. Step Seven: Extermination (1 week)

- a. Topics Introduced
 - i. How the genocide is actually carried out
 - ii. Actions that combat this step
- b. Suggested Activities
 - i. Weekly journaling

9. Step Eight: Denial (1 week)

- a. Topics Introduced
 - i. The ways that perpetrators prevent themselves from being implicated in the carrying out of genocide
 - ii. Actions that combat this step
- b. Suggested Activities
 - i. Weekly journaling

10. After Genocide (1 week)

- a. Topics Introduced
 - i. How societies are able to rebuild after the end of genocide

b. Suggested Activities

- i.** Weekly journaling
- ii.** Gacaca court simulation

11. Group Work (1 week)

12. Presentations (1 week)

a. Suggested Activities

- i.** Presentations of group projects
- ii.** Final essay

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, we have found that while the teaching of genocide varies wildly across education systems, many of these systems have acknowledged the importance of teaching the subject. Even in states that do not mandate the teaching of genocide usually mention the Holocaust, at least in passing, during lessons on World War II. What many of these curricula do, though, is teach the events of the Holocaust as a one-time event perpetrated by a man so evil that humanity cannot possibly fathom the extent of his evilness. This is a dangerous move. Portraying Hitler and the Nazi Regime as men so distant from “normal” humanity implies that a normal person could not ever commit these atrocious acts. People internalize this belief that no one could possibly be as evil as Hitler was, blinding themselves to the signs that someone else might be going down the same path. This is why it is vitally important to educate students on the details of genocide, so that they might recognize these signs whenever they manifest themselves.

No one looks back at 1930s and 1940s Germany and thinks that all of a sudden Hitler woke up one morning and decided to start murdering Jews. Genocide is less of an individual act, and more of a process. The reason why so many average German citizens did not realize the full extent of what was happening behind the walls of the concentration and death camps was because Hitler was able to normalize it through years of propaganda and smaller, but still violent, acts. This is the same pattern we saw in Rwanda, Cambodia, and so many other places around the world where genocide has taken place. This is why the focus of such a curriculum should be on not just statistics and trivia facts about the killings, but also about the propaganda that marginalized the other and the rhetoric that lead people to turn on their longtime neighbors and friends. If students cannot learn to recognize the signs of actions that create the perfect scenario for genocide, then we cannot possibly expect them to turn “never again” into a reality; if we

cannot learn from the mistakes of the past, then we are doomed to repeat history over and over again.

There are many challenges and constraints high school social studies teachers face in regards to deciding what, and how to teach, particularly under the limitations of state requirements and time. However, the importance of human rights studies is becoming increasingly evident as advocacy groups and academics continue their work. Educating pupils about genocide and atrocities occurring around the world invokes the realization that the immense cruelty and tragedy of the Holocaust is not simply an “aberration of the past,” but a threat that “haunts contemporary society” too. It is founded upon the current literature and personal experiences of high school teachers that we recommend a high school human rights curriculum that highlights global citizenship and moral imperative. There is an abundance of resources available to high school level educators that wish to go about incorporating material on genocide into their courses, whether it is in the scope of geography, world or US history courses; however, the complex nature of the topic calls for an in-depth approach in order to establish an effective learning environment. For this reason, a semester-long elective course centered upon the topic would be ideal. The course would utilize both traditional and non-traditional teaching methods to ensure foundational understanding and provide necessary context, but also promote higher level thinking and creative application via media and technology. We recommend the use of contemporary graphic novels and documentary films to serve as a basis for class discussions, giving students a starting point to consider difficult questions. Additionally, the abundance of online resources provide platforms through which teachers may engage the class ((i.e. video interviews, podcasts, online art exhibits, video games)) in a way that enhances critical thinking that may be applied to the current world. This curriculum guide aims to allow students to

understand diverse perspectives while developing their own voice, in order to become an engaged and advocative member of the global community.

V. Appendix

Activity	Weekly Journaling	
Concepts	Engage in research and writing skills to demonstrate learning	
Resources	N/A	
<p>Description Each week students should be given 20 minutes of class time to journal in a notebook about their thoughts based on what they have learned. Little instruction should be given about what they should write about so that students can write whatever they are thinking.</p>	<p>Instructional Strategies N/A</p>	
<p>Essential Questions N/A</p>		

Activity	Gacaca Court Simulation	
Concepts	Understanding the role Gacaca Courts played in repairing Rwandan society	
Resources	https://www.hrw.org/report/2011/05/31/justice-compromised/legacy-rwandas-community-based-gacaca-courts	
Description Assign students different roles, either as people accused of committing crimes, or as members of the community. Have them simulate the Gacaca Court process, deciding if the people on trial are guilty, and assigning punishments.	Instructional Strategies N/A	
Essential Questions What were the ways that Gacaca Courts were able to help repair Rwandan society? Were they successful?		

Activity	Reichstag Election Simulation	
Concepts	Frustration of the masses, marginalization of the other, understanding the steps leading up to genocide	
Resources	https://drive.google.com/a/student.american.edu/file/d/0BxTTO7XT0pLqTUttX0wwQjFsOGc/view?usp=sharing (Link to handout for teacher, and descriptions for different candidates)	
Description	<p>This simulation translates the post-WWI state of Germany into more relatable terms of a “post-WWIII United States.” Punishments and restrictions are placed on the US similar to the ones placed on Germany during the Treaty of Versailles.</p> <p>After reading about the current state of affairs in the country, students are presented with four candidates, each representing the candidate of a major party during the 1930s in Germany. After reviewing each of the candidate’s profiles, students should vote on who they would vote for given the conditions they are living under.</p>	<p>Instructional Strategies</p> <p>In most cases, students will elect the Hitler candidate without prompting, and without realizing that Albert Hunter is supposed to represent Hitler. However, if students aren’t leaning towards electing Hunter, do not force it. Instead, direct the discussion following on why they chose the candidate they did and then encourage them to think about why someone might have chosen Hunter</p> <p>The attached simulation is a little outdated in terms of the years used and significance of some cities and sectors. Feel free to update the simulation as necessary, but remain in the same general area with regards to the parallels to 1930s Germany.</p>
Essential Questions	<p>Why was Albert Hunter (“Adolf Hitler”) elected? What made him an appealing candidate in comparison to his competitors?</p> <p>How did the Treaty of Versailles contribute the feelings of the German population?</p>	