

STUDYING GENOCIDE

TEACHER'S GUIDE

SUMMARY

- // Intended for Secondary Cycle Two History and Ethics classes
- // Addresses nine cases of genocide recognized by the United Nations (UN) or the Canadian government
- // Comparative, sociohistorical and ethical approach

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“Remember the names of the genocides so that you do not face such an event in your time.”

*EXCERPT FROM MIRON, G., L'HOMME RAPAILLÉ
(ÉDITIONS TYPO, 1996), 172, TRANSLATION*

“Twenty-six letters of the alphabet are enough to create the world's beauty, but only two words are needed to destroy it: 'us' and 'them.'”

*EXCERPT FROM ELKOURI, R., MANAM
(ÉDITIONS BORÉAL, 2019), 152*

INTRODUCTION

The general aim of this guide is to make sure that students are equipped to build a better local and global society. To prevent genocide, we need to do more than “remember the names of the genocides”: we need to develop an understanding of this complex phenomenon.

Therefore, teaching about genocide is not an easy task. Certain concerns prevent teachers from tackling this sensitive issue head-on: concerns about the students' reaction to the crimes they will learn about, the racism and hatred expressed in them, and so forth. For many teachers, teaching about genocide is a “sensitive issue” (Hirsch and Moisan, 2022) that meets four specific criteria.

**1.**

Genocide clashes with both teachers' and students' values and social representations. How is it possible that so many people are able to do things that seem so inhuman? How can you convey the world views underlying unacceptable behaviours adopted not by a few individuals but by entire societies and their elected governments? For young people living in a democratic society like Québec and Canada, that defends individual rights and freedoms and values pluralism, the world in which genocide can take place seems far removed from their reality. Yet many of the “stages of genocide,” such as exclusion (racism, discrimination, segregation, etc.) are also found in democracies. How can this be explained? How can teachers address the issue without falling into the trap of doom-mongering? What can we do to fight these warning signs?

2.

Genocide is a topical subject. As citizens of the world, we should be paying attention to everything happening around us and acting for the common good in our society and elsewhere. Minority groups around the world are currently suffering genocide-like assaults. But these are not always recognized as genocide. The international community appears not to know what to do about these situations and can be indifferent to them. The recognition of genocide is also an issue for the genocides addressed in this guide, most of which are recognized by the United Nations (UN). Whether we consider the days of commemoration, the ongoing trials receiving major media attention, or the actions of victims' associations fighting for the recognition of the crimes committed, the genocides of the 20th century are still arousing interest, discord or, at least, emotion. Meanwhile, the perpetrators deny their intention to commit genocide, downplay the importance of their actions or justify themselves based on the context (civil war, world war, self-defence, etc.). Some even use the fact that the historical definition of genocide was adopted after certain genocides were committed, to deny that they were, in fact, genocides. These political issues are addressed in this tool via the conceptual analysis of a historical episode (the definition of genocide adopted by the UN and inspired by Raphael Lemkin, as well as the genocide process grid). However, the fact that the answers to today's questions are not obvious or even certain makes the teaching of genocide all the more sensitive.



3.

Not everyone agrees on the definition of genocide or how genocide should be taught. In our pluralistic society, not all experts and teachers think that we should be talking about genocide. Some question the definition adopted by the UN, others, the interpretation of the historical facts used to determine whether genocide did indeed occur. Talking about genocide in the classroom can be just as problematic. All of the aspects addressed—recognizing genocide, understanding its impact, thinking about the ethical dilemmas experienced by the actors involved, analyzing legal issues—can become the subject of debate in the classroom.

4.

Genocide is a complex phenomenon involving multiple geopolitical, historical, identity, ethical and cultural issues. It must therefore be addressed in an interdisciplinary manner. Teaching about genocide is complex, because the questions raised do not have a single, simple answer. Time is required to develop an answer that takes every aspect into account. Teaching about genocide is also complex in pedagogical terms: At what age should we introduce students to genocide? Can genocides be compared? Is it right to do so? The answers to these questions require a certain amount of expertise on the part of teachers. They must take risks and choose the relevant knowledge and the appropriate tools as they see fit.

*GENOCIDE OF THE TUTSI
IN RWANDA*

Rwandan refugees fleeing to the refugee camp in Goma, Congo. The camp held more than 1.2 million people in 1994.

Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

This tool was designed to help teachers who want to explore genocide with their students in all its complexity and its sensitivity and to encourage those who are still reticent. It is not a question of ignoring the sensitive nature of the topic by trying to “simplify” teaching about genocide, but rather to provide a tool that takes into account the questions that teachers regularly ask themselves, for example:

**What content is essential?
How can I find reliable
information tailored to
my students?**

The tool contains documents on each genocide, including timelines, maps, witness accounts and historical documents. The genocide process grid was designed to help teachers and students understand genocide by systematically analyzing examples of them, comparing them and identifying measures to resist and prevent this crime.

**How can I present this
gruesome content to
my students?**

The texts and photos were carefully chosen to illustrate the events and the perspectives of the actors and to avoid facts or events that are too horrible to contemplate. We made an effort to avoid causing students emotional shock, which is not conducive to learning.

**What information should
students retain?**

In addition to learning the facts of each genocide, students will understand that it is possible to put an end to genocide at different stages of the process. They will also learn that they have the power to act and that they can influence government decisions.

A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL: THE RESULT OF A LENGTHY RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION PROCESS



This guide is designed to meet the needs of schools and proposes a new approach inspired by Gregory Stanton's genocide process grid (Genocide Watch—Ten Stages of Genocide). We simplified Stanton's chart, paring down the ten stages to six, and enhanced it by taking into account the actions of the actors involved (victims, perpetrators, witnesses, allies and collaborators) and their impact.

The genocide process grid is the cornerstone of the proposed instructional tools and the theoretical concepts analyzed.

Holocaust

Eastern European Jew before the Holocaust
Credit: Montreal Holocaust Museum

The tools proposed in this guide

1. DEFINITION OF GENOCIDE ACCORDING TO THE UNITED NATIONS

The first step in talking about genocide in school is to define the concept. This is necessary not only to be able to choose which genocides to teach, but also to propose a framework for discussion.

In this guide, we chose to use the definition of genocide adopted by the UN in the 1948 *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*.

In the Convention, genocide is defined as follows:

“. . . any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

Three elements of this definition stand out:

Anyone of the five actions is sufficient to qualify a situation as a genocide.

The **intent** is what distinguishes genocide from other crimes against humanity (see the information sheets). Genocide is planned and executed with the aim of eliminating a group because it is a distinct group (ethnic, national, racial or religious).

In whole or in part: whether or not the goal of eliminating a people is “achieved,” the attempt is qualified as genocide. In fact, it can be said that all of the genocides presented in this guide “failed,” because they left survivors who could tell their story and, more importantly, live on as a people.

The advantage of this definition is that it provides clear reference points for analyzing cases of genocide and determining their status. It is a legal approach. This allows us to go beyond simplistic comparisons of the importance of a genocide based on its “size” or scope: a genocide cannot be larger or smaller than another, or more or less important. It also helps us to recognize that different genocides were executed differently: by famine, summary executions, targeted attacks on a community, or organized and industrialized mass murder.

The fact that we chose this definition does not mean that it does not pose methodological, epistemological or practical problems. For example, the range of actions encompassed in the definition makes it impossible to distinguish between the different crimes against humanity. In addition, the definition dates from 1948, while several recognized genocides (and some presented in this guide) were committed before that date. This raises the question of historical context: can we judge a past society against today's standards?

Despite these shortcomings, we chose to use this definition because it allows us to identify the historical phenomena in the guide. In fact, calling a genocide a genocide is a legal, historical, political, social and even diplomatic issue. While some genocides are recognized by all parties as being genocides, others are still the topic of debate. It was necessary to find a common point of departure, subject to some consensus, for what should be included in this guide. In the end, we chose nine genocides, which allowed us to present several different cases. This definition also helps us become familiar with the tools used by the international community to adopt common reference points for crimes and how they are classified.

Lastly, it is important to remember that the definition can be questioned and adapted in the classroom. To do so, we chose to combine it with a genocide process grid in order to allow students to examine the issues surrounding the genocides in depth. By doing so, they will learn how to put the genocide into context and present it as a problem, and see the complexity of the historical phenomenon, while at the same time considering the social and diplomatic issues at stake.

Armenian refugees in Jerusalem, 1918

Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

GENOCIDE OF THE ARMENIANS



2. GENOCIDE PROCESS GRID – THE FOCAL POINT OF THE TOOL

One of the most well-known tools for analyzing a genocide is Gregory Stanton's [chart in ten stages](#). Although this tool is very useful for experts, it can be difficult to use in the classroom. Since it is extremely detailed, teachers and students need in-depth knowledge in order to distinguish between the different stages. For this reason, we designed a six-stage grid that includes the main components of genocide:

1. To classify
2. To dehumanize
3. To polarize
4. To organize
5. To persecute and to murder
6. To deny
6. Denial

The grid is the focal point of the tool because it provides a framework for the presentation of each of the genocides. After placing the genocide in its historical and ideological context, the texts describe each genocide according to the same six stages. Students come to realize that, although the events studied all meet the UN's definition of genocide, they unfolded differently and raise different questions.

The brief description of the historical context, the outline of the issue and the discussion of justice and recognition are all central to the study of the genocide in question. Comparing different cases allows students to better understand the mechanisms that lead to genocide so that they can recognize and prevent them.

Stanton's chart is designed to bring the perpetrators' actions to light. To contribute to students' citizenship education, we also addressed the impact of these actions on victims and the roles of each party, played individually or collectively. For this reason, we also included the main levers for action to prevent genocide (resistance and prevention) at the individual (student's), State and international levels.

3. RACISM

Racism underlies all genocide. Therefore, understanding racism as a social and historical phenomenon and how it manifests itself can help in analysing a genocidal situation. For this reason, three forms of racist ideologies present in society are explained in the guide. Then, several manifestations of racism are presented and exemplified: stereotypes, prejudices, discourse, discrimination, segregation, slavery and genocide. Finally, a series of sophisms, i.e. argumentative procedures - sometimes used in a social debate - based on apparently logical but false reasoning, are presented and dissected in order to help student recognize racism.

4. EXAMPLES OF GENOCIDES

The guide contains information documents on nine genocides recognized by the UN, Canada or Québec:

- // **Genocide of the Herero and Nama in Namibia**
- // **Genocide of the Armenians under the Ottoman Empire**
- // **Genocide of the Indigenous Peoples in Canada¹**
- // **The Holocaust**
- // **Genocide of the Roma and Sinti before and during World War II**
- // **The Holodomor**
- // **Genocide of Chams, Vietnamese and Khmer in Cambodia**
- // **Genocide of Muslims in Bosnia**
- // **Genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda**

¹ We decided to include the treatment of Indigenous Peoples in Canada in this broader reflection on genocide in order to help teachers and students participate in the public debate on the issue and in order to place this project in the framework of the Calls to Action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Each case study is divided into the same sections:

1. A timeline situating the key moments of the genocide
2. Highlights providing a quick overview
3. A map situating the genocide geographically
4. Excerpts from survivors' accounts
5. Key information containing:

// **An outline of the issue**, i.e. a brief description of the setting and questions to guide students during their study of the genocide.

// **The historical context** of the genocide, briefly describing the key elements, including the ideology on which the genocide was based and the factors that allowed it to proceed.

// **The genocide process** is presented in the third part of the document according to the six stages. For each stage, a short descriptive text is given, together with witness accounts, images and excerpts to help students analyze the genocide from a historical and critical standpoint.

// Lastly, each genocide is still discussed today from the perspective of **justice and recognition**. These genocides also receive regular media attention, especially on commemorative days. This last section is designed to encourage students to reflect on the long-term consequences of genocide and the ethical issues still relevant today.

5. INFORMATION SHEETS

Because genocide is a complex phenomenon, and because the interpretations of various events associated with genocide are regularly challenged or debated in the political, diplomatic and historical arenas, it was necessary to have the texts verified by experts recognized in their field. We called on two experts for each case study: an expert in the region and period (see detailed list at the end) and an expert on genocide, Professor Frank Chalk, Director of Concordia University's Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies. The texts were also submitted to representatives of the communities who were the victims of the genocide and who took the time to react to our presentations. We are sincerely grateful for their contribution.

The guide also contains very short documents (1 to 1½ pages) providing key information about the related content. Some sheets are specifically for use with the instructional tools, while others encourage students to think about justice and ethical issues and can be used as guides to answer students' questions. More specifically, these sheets address:

- // **United Nations (UN)**
- // **Prevention and resistance**
- // **Recognition of genocide**
- // **Right of asylum**
- // **Rule of law**
- // **Distinction among different crimes (genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, crimes of aggression)**
- // **Protection of minorities in contemporary society**



GENOCIDE IN CAMBODIA

Child soldiers recruited by the Khmer Rouge
Credit: Alan C.

6. INSTRUCTIONAL TOOLS (LESSON PLAN)

Two instructional tools (plans) are offered. They propose a step-by-step investigative approach that students can adopt individually or in groups. These include a student booklet in which students can note their thoughts, as well as key information. Answer keys are provided for each tool and each genocide. These plans were designed for the history or ethics programs (Secondary Cycle Two) and can be used together, separately or in an interdisciplinary manner.

1. Case study

The aim of the case study is to help students analyze a genocide based on the genocide process grid, asking their own questions or answering questions asked. They can study a single case or compare several cases and examine each of the six stages of the genocide process and the different ways in which they unfolded. At the same time, they explore other themes, such as the organization of the UN, intervention measures, the rule of law, the right to asylum and racism. Each of these themes is presented in a separate information sheet.

The teacher can choose one or more genocides based on personal interests or those of the students. Students can then explore various questions related to a genocide or address several genocides in a single question.

2. Racism, prevention and justice

The aim of this teaching tool is to reflect more specifically on racism, prevention and justice by analyzing cases of genocide, and to examine the possibility of taking action against racism in society and contributing to efforts to achieve justice.

While the teacher and students can focus on a particular phenomenon relating to genocide, they must still outline the issue and analyze the genocide using the genocide process grid.

LINKS WITH THE QUÉBEC EDUCATION PROGRAM



At the residential schools, students were subjected to forced labour, such as chopping firewood. Fort Resolution Residential School, St. Joseph's Convent, Northwest Territories.

Credit: Library and Archives Canada, PA-048021

Reference:

Hirsch, Sivane and Sabrina Moisan (2022). "Ouvrir des brèches sur le chaos du monde tout en favorisant les apprentissages. Les objets difficiles en classe d'histoire et d'éthique," in S. Moisan, S. Hirsch, M.-A. Éthier, and D. Lefrançois, eds. *Objets difficiles, thèmes sensibles et enseignement des sciences humaines et sociales* (Montréal: FIDES).

The guide can be used with either of the instructional tools, but can also be adapted to teachers' needs in other pathways or programs of study. However, the instructional tools are specially designed for the Québec Education Program, to help students develop subject-related competencies in history (History of the 20th Century), the Contemporary World (tensions and conflicts) and the Secondary Cycle Two Ethics and Religious Culture program. Note that the guide will be adapted to the new ethics program. It can also be used in other subject areas, such as languages.