

Criminality and Genocide

By sharpening student understanding of similarities and differences, studying genocides will enable a broader, yet more accurate, understanding of past crimes against humanity. Common patterns of criminal acts within genocides can be identified, and used for testing and understanding similar events.

The UN definition of genocide is a very useful term to use for teachers and can be used as an objective “template” for considering significant abuses of people, groups and communities in history.

International Law

Through studying genocides, we can improve student understanding of international law and processes, and how regimes who have committed genocide have been tried. This will encourage students to examine historic legal responses like the Nuremberg trials, but also more recent examples from the Yugoslavian war crimes trials in The Hague.

The creation of significant documents (e.g. United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the rights of the child) and the creation of the United Nations itself, are also relevant to a study of outcomes from 20th century genocide.

Values

Students will be asked to examine issues associated with humanity in their work and study. Thinking skills will be promoted by examining multiple examples of genocide with direct links to New Zealand (e.g. Jewish refugees – survivors of the European Holocaust coming to New Zealand after World War II, the flow of migrants from Cambodia in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the arrival of migrants from more contemporary conflicts).

There are also connections in the study of the Holocaust to Senior Social Studies, Religious Studies and Geography.

It is vital that students examine the causes, events and outcomes of genocide in an objective manner in order to collect, analyse and evaluate the scope of genocide in history.

Definition of Genocide

The word ‘genocide’ was coined during World War II in response to the crimes of the Nazis (and their collaborators) against European Jews and other victims of the Holocaust.

The United Nations defines genocide as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy - in whole or in part - a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, including:

- Killing members of the group
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group

- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about a physical destruction, in whole or part
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Other keywords include: altruism, anti-Semitism, armed resistance, bigotry, bystander, caricature, collaboration, cultural resistance, crimes against humanity, democracy, discrimination, ethnic cleansing, hate group, Holocaust, homophobia, insurgent, Judaism, liberation, Nuremberg Laws, Nuremberg Trials, occupation, perpetrator, prejudice, propaganda, racism, refugee, resistance, “Righteous Among the Nations”, stereotype, scapegoat, spiritual resistance, totalitarian, tyranny, victim, visual history testimony, war crimes trials.

As this unit of study is planned for student use, the above keywords should be used carefully with appropriate definitions. It must be stressed that they all convey different meanings within the greater topic of genocide and the Holocaust.

Areas of Focus

Causes and background: What is genocide? What are the similarities and differences between genocides? How does racism and/or religious intolerance cause genocide?

Events: Rwandan Civil war and the aftermath of colonialism in Africa; European Holocaust and World War II; Cambodia, communism and civil war in South East Asia; Yugoslavia and Balkan politics and society.

Outcomes: The human cost: Are there answers to ending genocide? What organisations exist such as the United Nations foster cooperation and peace? What does New Zealand do to prevent war, intolerance and anti-democracy in our own “back yard” (the Pacific)?

Specific Learning Outcomes

- Using student-based inquiry as a foundation for learning outcomes related to genocide and the Holocaust.
- Through careful comparisons between genocides, highlight certain similarities that will alert students of potential dangers within contemporary society. Help individuals and groups prepare via formal/informal means to stop genocide in the future.
- Deeper understanding of the dangers of genocide will strengthen community awareness and, consequently, resilience.
- Roles and responsibilities within young peoples’ communities will be enhanced by accurately studying causes, events and consequences related to genocide and the Holocaust.
- The importance of positive global citizenship will be reinforced.
- Multiple connections to New Zealand’s democratic past and present will be made through our commitment to the United Nations (e.g. Prime Minister, Peter Fraser’s attendance and actions at the 1945 United Nations Charter meeting (<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/38134/peter-fraser-signing-the-united-nations-charter-1945>)).

- Positive exposure to political education directly linked to the fundamental tenets of the United Nations
- Digital citizenship through constructive use of online tools and media for learning purposes.

Suggested Activities / Learning Opportunities

1. Produce questions about and around the topic (e.g. list as many questions about keywords, or topics within genocide as you can; share with classmates in an online environment; turn your collaboration into further questions).
2. Build an online wiki of statements about causes and consequences of genocide. Link web pages that have answers to the wiki, then evaluate your choices.
3. Which questions were open/closed on the topics you have studied (e.g. the Holocaust, Cambodia etc.). What does it indicate if there are more open or closed questions? Discuss in an online forum your findings, save the discussion and highlight the most interesting portions. Explain your choices in the format of your choice.
4. Prioritise your questions about genocide. Then customise the top-ranking questions, as if you were putting them to a Human Rights jurist. Explain and evaluate your choices.
5. Brainstorm possible uses of all the questions you have asked on issues surrounding or directly related to genocide. Are there any missing sections? (e.g. have you considered politics, economics, human rights, community welfare, the environment?)
6. Develop recognition between genocides.
7. Understand the past; create deeper connections with communities in New Zealand via learning about their experiences. Develop empathy in learning - especially with primary evidence from survivors of genocide.