



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Center for Middle Eastern Studies

Assignment Description (For Teachers)

Title: Surviving the Bosnian War

Author: Lisa Adeli, University of Arizona Center for Middle Eastern Studies, PhD in History.

Purpose/Connection to the Curriculum:

This lesson is designed for middle school classes studying the impact of modern war/genocides. Because of the age of the students, the primary focus of the lesson is on how civilians (especially children) survived during the war and the positive coping strategies they used to get through a terrible time in their lives (resilience). All the materials are included in order to keep the young people from researching online, where they are likely to come in contact with deeply disturbing images.

The Bosnian war, 1992-1995, is an especially interesting conflict as: (a) it occurred in Europe, (b) the prejudice that underlay it is based on concepts of national identity and discrimination unrelated to race, and (c) it is a case of people who identify as Christian persecuting those who identify as Muslims – with Jews working with and assisting the Muslims. (The conflict thus challenges US young people’s notion of race as the main way to separate groups of people as well as their idea that Muslims persecute Christians and don’t get along with Jews.)

Overview: The lesson begins with an overview of the war (powerpoint and teacher’s notes provided) and interactive discussion of its effects. Then, students work in shifting groups on an activity related to coping strategies that people used to survive the war. The final day is a debriefing of the full-day activity and a discussion of how people can help victims of a war. An optional project might be to implement a project to help people suffering because of a contemporary conflict.

Grade Level: middle school or early high school

Time: 3 class periods

Suggested Procedures

Day 1: Overview of the war whole group discussion. Using the powerpoint (**Document 2a**) with teachers’ notes (**Document 2b**), go over the background of the

conflict, allowing plenty of time for students to discuss, provide ideas, and ask questions. (Note: You will also need sound and an internet connection in order to play the Judy Collins' song "Song of Sarajevo" – from YouTube.)

Day 2: Activity on coping strategies used during the war.

1. Divide the class into 12 groups or pairs. Give each person one of the coping strategies **Document 3**), a 1-page document with a short paragraph, photos, and a thought question. (All members of the group have the same strategy, but each will need their own copy of the page.) Also, give each person a chart (**Document 4**) – and have them put their names at the top of the page.
2. Give the groups 5-10 minutes to read and discuss their strategy. In the first box on the chart, they should write their name of their strategy (Music or Art, for example). Below that they should put one comment of something they discussed – from the "to think about" part.
3. Each person now finds several people from different groups. (A total 2-3 people, each with a different strategy.) Each person briefly shares his/her strategy and ideas and asks the other people's comments on their "to think about" question. (10-15 minutes). Meanwhile, each person writes on his/her chart information on the other strategies (using some of the other boxes).
4. Repeat the process until each student has filled in all 6 boxes on their paper or until you run out of class time.
5. Collect the charts and the coping strategy sheets before students leave class, making sure their names are on everything. You can return them to use in the discussion the next day. (Keeping them yourself ensures they won't lose or forget them the next day, thereby having an excuse not to participate in the discussion!)

Day 3: Debrief.

1. Have each group discuss (informally, not a presentation) something they learned about their coping strategy during the war. All the other students in class are welcome to comment also. (You can hand back their coping strategy sheets as a reference tool.)
2. Ask students if they can think of a different kind of coping strategy, one that wasn't already discussed.
3. Remind them that most of the people who survived the Bosnian war went on to live good and fulfilling lives. The war may have shaped them and even scarred them, but it didn't destroy them or keep them from being happy and productive people.
4. Discuss what people in the US can do to help others suffering during or after a war.

Extending the Lesson: Have students take action to help people in the world suffering from a contemporary conflict. Plan a project in which they help local refugees OR help refugees or other victims of a conflict abroad. Some suggestions: (1) collecting supplies for local refugees, (2) raising money for UNICEF, the IRC, or a similar organization, (3) writing letters to US elected officials asking them to help in some way, (4) writing Facebook posts or tweets encouraging others to help refugees, (5) writing letters to children in refugee schools telling them they are not alone, or (6) planning a school or community event to educate people about the sufferings of civilians in modern wars.

Further Viewing/Reading for Teachers:

- “The Breakup of Yugoslavia,” a 17-minute video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiSgAiM0d8A>

- “Historical Overview: Bosnia,” a 5-page background of Bosnian history:

<https://cmes.arizona.edu/sites/cmes.arizona.edu/files/Bosnia%20-%20updated.pdf>

- *The Atlantic* – photos of the Bosnian war:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2012/04/20-years-since-the-bosnian-war/100278/>