

## Notes to the Powerpoint

Note: This is meant to be an interactive discussion. Allow plenty of time for the kids to ask questions and comment (appropriately).

**I. Introduction (Title Slide):** The Bosnian War took place from April 1992 through November 1995. During those years, civilians (including children) were systematically targeted. The capital city of Sarajevo and other cities were surrounded and put “under siege,” with access to food and supplies cut off and with shell fire and snipers targeting anyone living there. Many smaller towns and villages were “ethnically cleansed” with people from certain ethnic groups killed, imprisoned in camps, or forced out of the area. It was a terrible time with people suffering a lot (and continuing to remember that pain to this day). Yet, the Bosnian people are also strong, resilient, funny, and warm people. Therefore, we will talk about some of the terrible things that happened but also about how many people survived these terrible things to become positive people living good lives.

### II. A look at Bosnia

**A. (Slides 2-10).** Notice that Bosnia-Herzegovina (“Bosnia” for short) is a place that is very beautiful.

**B. (Slides 11-13).** The people are beautiful too. (Note: The people in these photos are “Bosniaks,” meaning Bosnian Muslims.)

**C. (Slides 14-15).** Yet only 25 years ago, Bosnia looked like this....Why and how did it happen?

### III. Background to the war

**A. (Slide 16).** The Bosnian war was the most long-lasting and violent of a series of wars concerning the breakdown of a country called Yugoslavia. The colored areas on this map are all parts of what was Yugoslavia. Today six of these parts are independent countries – only Vojvodina (pronounced: VoyVOHdeena) is still part of Serbia (notice they are both shades of pink), while Kosovo (just below Serbia) has a status that is not quite determined.

**1. Question:** What do you know about the US civil war? Why do you think it was a very hard time in our history?

**2.** Note that the breakdown of Yugoslavia also resulted in a series of civil wars that were equally violent and terrible. Like the US civil war, these wars pitted “brother against brother,” often people who looked similar and spoke the same language.

#### **B. Who were the people involved in the war?**

**1.** People everywhere have a tendency to fight over political power or jobs/riches. But *how* they decide who gets what varies. In early times, it often depended on what class you were born into. In the US (historically and today), we often classify people (and are prejudiced for or against people) according to race. In some other places, people are divided into different groups (“nationalities”) according to the language they speak at home. But in Bosnia, people look similar and speak the same language. So who are the different groups?

2. In Bosnia (and other parts of the former-Yugoslavia), it depends on your “nationality.” But how can people have different nationalities when they all live together, look similar, and speak the same language?
3. (Slide 17). Nationality is determined by your religion – or, if you don’t practice a religion, by the religion of your ancestors. What does this mean? Let’s say you live in Sarajevo and have lived there your whole life.
- a. If you are Orthodox Christian, you are called a “Serb” or, to be more specific, a “Bosnian Serb.” It doesn’t matter if you have never set foot in an Orthodox church or if you have never visited Serbia, you are still a Serb. Always.
  - b. If you are a Catholic (also a type of Christian), you are called a “Croat” or “Bosnian Croat.” It doesn’t matter if you have never set foot in a Catholic church or if you have never visited Serbia, you are still a Croat. And you will always be one.
  - c. If you are a Muslim (the largest group in Bosnia), your “nationality” was “Muslim.” But since that got confusing during the last war, they started calling Bosnian Muslims “Bosniaks.” Once again, it doesn’t matter if you have never set foot in a mosque; you are still a Muslim.
  - d. And Bosnia’s small Jewish community? You guessed it! They are “Jews” by “nationality.”
- E. (Slide 18). In the country there was NO majority (no one group had more than 50% - ½ the population). The percentage has change slightly since this chart, but the overall impact is the same. In 1992, Bosniaks (Muslims) were 43.5%, Serbs were 31.2; Croats were 17.4%. The rest were people who chose not to declare or were small minorities. Why are there less Serbs and Croats after the war? NOT because more Serbs were killed (quite the opposite – their numbers were higher just after the war). However, many Serbs and Croats moved to Serbia or Croatia after the war since Bosnia became poorer as a result of the war.
4. So how did people during the war know who is who?
- a. You might know them personally from school, work, or everyday life. They might be your neighbors.
  - b. You can look at their ID card. It wouldn’t have “Serb” or “Muslim” written on it, but you could usually tell by someone’s name.
  - c. In most of Sarajevo, it didn’t matter. If someone stayed there, they were targets.
5. (Slide 19). So who fought whom?
- a. When Bosnia first declared its independence from Yugoslavia in 1992 (to AVOID choosing between Serbia and Croatia and ensure that the rights of all peoples were guaranteed), the Muslims, Croats, and other groups favored independence. The Serbs were opposed.
  - b. The Bosnian Serbs were supported by the Serbs of Yugoslavia and committed terrible atrocities – in Sarajevo and in the countryside.
  - c. In 1993, Bosnian Croats, supported by Croatia, started to fight against the Bosniaks in order to make their areas part of Croatia.

- d. The Jews and other smaller groups were not specifically targeted, but anyone who remained in the city of Sarajevo or other towns under siege were shot at.
- e. Although all sides did bad things (as happens in any war), in general, the Christian groups (Serbs, Croats) committed most of the war crimes, while the Muslim Bosniaks were their main victims.

#### IV. What the war looked like

**A.** In the countryside, there was often “ethnic cleansing.” That meant that one ethnic group (usually Bosniaks) would be forced out by other groups (usually Serbs or Croats) in the area.

**1. (Slide 20).** Sometimes the men were killed (such as what happened in Srebrenica – pronounced “SREbreneetsa”), and women and children forced to flee. Sometimes there were concentration camps in which men, women, and children were imprisoned. **(Slide 21-22)** About 2.2 MILLION people were displaced by the war, either becoming refugees to another country or internally displaced persons within their own country.

**2. (Slide 23).** Discuss how the war affected people in these areas. (Consider the trauma of losing loved ones, losing their homes, having to start over in another place, AND knowing that their neighbors and former friends did this to them.)

**B.** In the cities, people often lived under siege (meaning surrounded and attacked by enemy forces).

**1. (Slide 24-25).** The siege of Sarajevo (Serbs attacking the city) lasted 1,425 days (almost 4 years) and was the longest siege of a capital city in modern history.

**2. (Slide 26).** In Mostar, the siege was shorter (1 ½ year – Croats attacking the city), but very intense.

**3. (Slide 27).** Discuss how the war affected people who stayed in the city. (Consider what it means to live in a modern city when often the food supply, water lines, electricity, and natural gas – for heating during the severe winters – are cut, sometimes for long periods of time. Note that people had to go out to get firewood – or else they burned books and furniture to cook or keep warm. But they had to go out for food or, especially, water. Even children helped with that task. Going outside was dangerous since snipers targeted everyone, and mortars/shells slammed into the city from the surrounding hills. Of course, children often couldn’t go outside to attend school or to play. Even at home it wasn’t safe – shell fire could smash through the windows or walls at any time and kill people in their homes. Children sometimes spent most of their time in basements or windowless – safer – places like bathrooms. People were often hungry – not starving, but with little and not-so-tasty food, cold – no heat, and frightened. People mourned the deaths – or loss through moving – of loved ones or even of children they didn’t know but heard about on the news.) Remind students that this went on for YEARS, and no one knew when it would end.

**4. (Slide 28).** Judy Collins’ “Song for Sarajevo,” written in 1994 during the Bosnian war. It is from a child’s point of view. (The lyrics are - <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/judycollins/songforsarajevo.html>.)

**V. (Slide 29).** Most Bosnians who survived the war, including children who grew up during it, experienced terrible things, yet most went on to lead good lives. Think about – and suggest ways – that people coped during the war years. (What kinds of things do you do when something bad is happening in your life?) You will be doing an activity about this tomorrow.