

## Presentation Notes: Commemoration of Wars/Genocides

1. **(Slide 1)** Students are to think critically about how we choose to remember a war or genocide, what “lessons” are we expected to learn from the event. We will look together at two different case studies, examining how events are commemorated.

2. Case Study #1: Armenians remember the 1915 genocide. (Define “genocide” as the attempt to eliminate a whole population.)

### A. Facts **(Slide 2)**:

1. It occurred in 1915, during World War organized by the government of the Ottoman Empire, who accused the Armenians (not really fairly) of collaborating with the Russian enemy.

2. Over 1 million Armenians were deported from their homes in today’s Turkey. Many (especially men) were butchered outright; women and children were force-marched into the Syrian desert and died of disease, starvation, and exhaustion during the process.

3. As many as 1.5 million died.

4. Turkey today denies that the genocide occurred, which enrages Armenians. The Turks say that the event either didn’t happen or that the Turks shouldn’t be held accountable since the genocide occurred before the creation of the modern Turkish state. Armenians think about and discuss the genocide nearly every day and find the Turkish denial particularly upsetting.

**B. (Slide 3)** The Armenian genocide memorial in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. Overview of the memorial: The memorial is in a park, and there is one place where trees are planted in commemoration. In the picture, you are looking at the main parts of the memorial: the stele (pointed structure) and the twelve slabs in a circle with the eternal flame inside. To your left, you would see a low wall inscribed with the names of towns and villages where massacres were known to have occurred. **(Slide 4)** There are also some recent graves and other commemorations nearby (not shown in the picture). Also, not shown is the entrance to an underground museum and archives of the genocide.

1. What are your overall impressions of the monument and its meaning? Now let’s think about its individual features.

2. **(Slide 5)** What do you think that the stele represents? Why do you think it is split partway? According to Armeniapedia, the stele as a whole symbolizes “the survival and spiritual rebirth of the Armenian people.” It is “partly split vertically by a deep crevice” in order to symbolize “the tragic and violent dispersion of the Armenian people, and at the same time, express the unity of the Armenian people.”

3. **(Slide 6)** This picture is inside the circular structure, which has 12 tall basalt slabs. (Note that this is HUGE, much bigger than it looks in the picture.) What do you think the significance is? The number 12: represents the 12 regions affected by the genocide. Bending inward: “bending in grief” over the eternal flame. Eternal flame: never ending tribute to the victims.

4. I could not find a picture of this, but there are some graves from the 1990s conflict with Azerbaijan over Karabakh. Why do you think the recent graves are in the midst of a memorial to a much older event? (Association of Azerbaijanis, a Turkic people, with the Turks.) Do you think the two events are related? (Genocide versus wartime deaths? Discuss.)
5. Reflect on how and why the Armenians remember this genocide. What does it mean to them? (Reflection of their national identity, unhealed wound since the Turks don't acknowledge it, nationalism and expression of Armenian identity especially with respect to neighboring Turkic peoples – including Azerbaijanis as well as Turks.)
6. Memorials to the Armenian genocide are EVERYWHERE in Armenia. There were two in one school (School #5) in Vanadzor, Armenia. **Slide 7** shows one of the memorials, which is just outside the National Defense classroom (the equivalent to our JROTC but a required subject for Armenian students from 8<sup>th</sup> grade up). Notice the symbolism: The shooting practice (in the hall of the school!! Armenia apparently has no fear of school violence.) takes place right under the memorial (literally). Also notice how there is another memorial on the wall next to the commemoration of the genocide; it is a tribute to those who died in the 1990s fighting with Azerbaijan over Karabakh. (Note the association, as in the main memorial in Yerevan, of the two events. And note the identification of “national defense” with the struggle against Turks and Turkic peoples.)
7. Discuss: How might a monument to the Armenian genocide be different if it was constructed in the U.S.? in Turkey?

### 3. Case study #2: Vietnam War Memorialization

A. (**Slide 8**) Facts: Between 1954 and 1975, a military conflict occurred between the non-Communist forces of South Vietnam, supported by the United States, and the communist forces of North Vietnam, then supported by China and the Soviet Union. Almost 2.5 million people died in the war: just over 58,000 of them were U.S. soldiers. (By contrast, the Vietnamese lost well over 1,000,000 soldiers and civilians.) In the end, the U.S. pulled out, and Communist forces took over the country. The U.S. considered this a defeat in the war against Communism; the Vietnamese considered it a reunification of their country. Predict: How do you think the Vietnamese and Americans might represent the war differently through their memorials?

#### B. In Vietnam:

1. (**Slide 9**) What do you notice about the memorial to the Vietnam War in Vietnam's capital? Note that it's a very imperious setting, in the center of governmental power. What do you see in the background? (Vietnamese flag and then the mausoleum of the Vietnamese wartime leader: Ho Chi Minh)
2. (**Slide 10**) Look at the picture of Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum to the left. What does it remind you of (in terms of construction and purpose)? Note the glorification of an individual hero and the sense of national triumph.

3. Also on Slide 10, to your right is the Vietnam War Remnants Museum, formerly called the Exhibition House of American War Crimes. (Why might they have changed the name? Hint: Now more than one million of the visitors have been foreigners, and many Americans now visit.) The museum has vivid photographs of wartime suffering, graphic descriptions of the attacks using agent orange and napalm, and even tanks, bombs, and planes used during the war. What was the purpose in developing such an exhibit? How do you think an American museum/monument to the war might be different?

C. In the U.S.:

1. **(Slide 11)** Remember that Americans were deeply divided about the war. Predict: Why do you think that designing a Vietnam War memorial in the U.S. might be extremely controversial? What might people disagree about?

2. **(Slide 12)** The famous Vietnam War memorial in Washington DC – to honor those Americans who died in the war – was designed by Maya Lin, a Chinese-American architectural student at Yale who won the design competition. It was dedicated in 1982. The wall is slightly less than 247 feet long (It's huge!) and contains the names of Americans who died in the war. In what way might the design be considered controversial? Why would it upset some people?

3. Many veterans' groups opposed the design of the memorial because it lacked a traditional memorial's heroic statues and stirring words. Some people referred to it as "a black gash of shame" and "a nihilistic slab of stone." **(Slide 13)** So in 1984, they dedicated this statue, which stands near the wall. What do you notice about the servicemen in the statue? (One is white, one is African-American, one is Hispanic.) Discuss why the memorial was created this way. (Emphasis on diversity in the U.S. at that time, recognition that an integrated military was a significant product of the war, wanting to represent ALL Americans who served.)

4. Whose contributions are missing from both memorials? **(Slide 14)** The contributions of women (mostly nurses) were recognized in this statue dedicated in 1993.

5. **(Slide 15)** Though all 3 together cover all the bases, it's the wall that is today considered one of the most moving and beloved memorials in the U.S. Why do you think this is? How does the memorial affect people? How have differing times – or the passage of time – led to a preference for a different kind of memorial than previously?

6. What are the differences between the Vietnamese memorialization of the war and the American? What do you think accounts for that? (Consider the types of governments, the countries' degree of success in the war, cultural differences.)

4. Discussion.

A. What purpose does a memorial serve? Who determines how an event is portrayed/commemorated?

B. If you were designing a monument, what factors would you have to take into consideration?