



Ashbury College Canadian History, Grade 10 CHES Workshop inspires excellence in Holocaust Education

By Alyssa Novick

At Ashbury College students spend 3 weeks (approximately 8 classes of 80 minutes) on the Holocaust unit as part of the Grade 10 Canadian History course. To put the unit into proper historical context we begin with the rise of Hitler and the situation in Germany post-World War I. We then move on to cover the main issues of the Holocaust, such as the move from anti-Semitism as part of Nazi policy to legislation to violence to ghettos and concentration camps and finally to mass murder by bullets and gas. Students also study resistance, rescue, and liberation.

Students use two booklets that the department has put together over the years, 3-4 films, or parts of films, and are engaged in teacher-led and student-led discussions. We tweak the program every year, but it generally covers the same main points.

At the end of the unit, instead of a standard type of test students have done a variety of assignments, such as writing a reflection on Elie Wiesel's *Night*. But when I heard Professor Cotler speak at the CHES 2018 Teachers Workshop and read his article, I decided to adapt the assignment and use his article as a basis for a reflection on the whole unit. It gives the students a more global view of genocide and allows them to choose a lesson in Professor Cotler's article that speaks to them. They then must go back through their notes and critically analyse and decide how to make links between the lesson they chose and specific information we had covered in the unit.

The student's assignment/reflection by Justin Ma, *Indifference in Genocide* is included below. Alyssa Novick (B.A. Hons, M.A., BEd) has been teaching history and International Baccalaureate History in grades 10-12 at Ashbury College for over 30 years. She has led several student history trips to the US and Europe. Alyssa shared her outstanding lesson plan with CHES and it is now available on our website for educators to download for free.

**Grade 10 Canadian History Course
CHC2D/B
Assignment- Holocaust Reflection
Teacher: Alyssa Novick***

Read the following instructions carefully.

1. Read, highlight and annotate the article called “Six lessons from the Rwandan Genocide.” (See below.)
2. We will discuss it in the next class.
3. Choose one of the lessons that the author gives that mean the most to you or that you think is the most important. Choose one that we spent time on in class. (1,2, or 6 are the best options.)
4. Then do the following:
 - Explain, in your own words, what the passage means.
 - Explain how this lesson, although it is about the genocide in Rwanda, links to what we have learned in our unit on the Holocaust. Give specific examples. They can be found **in our readings, in the films we have seen, and in the discussions we have had.**
 - Link the lesson to the information explicitly. For example: The lesson on remembering the “heroic rescuers” can be connected to our discussion on Denmark and how they saved their Jews. Or in lesson one, on demonizing groups, we have seen information from Nazi propaganda that was part of everyday life and that was taught in the schools.
 - Make sure to give 4 specific examples that tie in.
 - Explain why you feel that this lesson is the most important, but **DO NOT** say because if we don’t learn history, we are condemned to repeat it. Be more thoughtful.

You can use the booklets, the articles we have read, the films we have watched and your notes. Length: approximately 350-400 words.

Evaluation:

Knowledge /10

Thinking /10

Communication /5

Application /5

Resource Article

Twenty years after the Rwandan genocide, six lessons to remember

IRWIN COTLER

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On this important anniversary, where we have both the obligation to remember and the duty to act, we must ask ourselves: What have we learned? What must we do?

As former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan lamented on the 10th anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide, “Such crimes cannot be reversed. Such failures cannot be repaired. The dead cannot be brought back to life. So what can we do?”

The answer is that the international community will only prevent the killing fields of the future by heeding the lessons from past tragedies such as the Rwandan genocide. What then are these lessons? And, to paraphrase Kofi Annan: “What must we do?”

The first and enduring lesson of the Rwandan genocide – not unlike the Holocaust – is that they occurred not only because of the machinery of death, but because of state-sanctioned incitement to hate and genocide. It is this teaching of contempt, this demonizing of the other – this is where it all begins.

As the Supreme Court of Canada recognized, and as echoed by the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda, the Holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers – it began with words. These, as the Court put, are the chilling facts of history – the catastrophic effects of racism. Indeed, as the jurisprudence of the Rwandan tribunals has demonstrated, these acts of genocide were preceded by – and anchored in – the state-orchestrated demonization and dehumanization of the minority Tutsi population – using cruel, biological ascriptions of Tutsis as “inyenzi” (cockroaches) – prologue and justification for their mass murder.

In the aftermath of the 65th anniversary of the Genocide Convention, the international community must bear in mind – as the Supreme Court affirmed in the Mugesara case – that incitement to genocide is a crime in and of itself. Taking action to prevent it, as the Genocide Convention compels us, is not a policy option; it is an international legal obligation of the highest order.

The second lesson is the danger of indifference and the consequences of inaction. The genocide of Rwandan Tutsis occurred not only because of the machinery of death and a state-sanctioned culture of hate, but also because of crimes of indifference and conspiracies of silence. What makes the Rwandan genocide so unspeakable is not only the horror of the genocide, but that this genocide was preventable. Simply put, while the UN Security Council and the international community dithered and delayed, Rwandans were dying.

The third lesson is the danger of a culture of impunity. If the last century was the age of atrocity, it was also the age of impunity. Few of the perpetrators were brought to justice. Just as there cannot be a sanctuary for hate or a refuge for bigotry, neither can there be a haven for the perpetrators of the worst crimes against humanity.

That is why, as minister of justice, I initiated the first ever prosecution under the War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity Act of Rwandan war criminal Désiré Munyaneza.

The fourth lesson is the danger of the vulnerability of the powerless and the powerlessness of the vulnerable – the brutalized children, women victimized by massive sexual violence, the slaughter of the innocents – all the first targets of mass atrocity. It is our responsibility to empower the powerless while giving voice to the voiceless, wherever they may be.

The fifth lesson is the cruelty of genocide denial — an assault on memory and truth – a criminal conspiracy to whitewash the Rwandan genocide. In the most obscene form of genocide denial – as in the case also of Holocaust denial – it actually accuses the victims of falsifying this “hoax.” Remembrance of the Rwandan genocide is itself a repudiation of such denial – which tragically becomes more prevalent with the passage of time.

The sixth lesson is the importance of remembering the heroic rescuers, those who remind us of the range of human possibility; those who stood up to confront evil, prevailed, and transformed history.

Finally, and most important, we must remember and pay tribute to the survivors who endured the worst of inhumanity – of crimes against humanity – and somehow found in the resources of their own humanity the will to go on, to contribute and to make our society a better and more compassionate community.

And so, this anniversary must be an occasion not only to remember but to learn the lessons of the crime whose name we should even shudder to mention – namely genocide – and most important: to act on these lessons.

Irwin Cotler is a Liberal MP, an emeritus Professor of Law at McGill University. He represented the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Prevention of Genocide and other Crimes against Humanity at Kwibuka 20 – the Official Launch of the 20th anniversary marking the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.