

GENOCIDE EDUCATION - QUOTE ACTIVITY

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Why use firsthand testimony in the classroom?

When teaching about cases of extreme violence, we historicize the events that occurred in order to understand the big overarching picture and the roots and futures of events that occurred, but utilizing first hand accounts from target groups in teaching about genocide and mass violations of human rights are important to show what these processes look like to targets, and to allow students to better understand the impacts of mass atrocities. Targets of violence are in a unique position to see not only how these processes feel, but also how they function and how these events are disseminated. Often their accounts highlight events that only targets would remember and understand the significance of. In many cases, small things that are detailed in these accounts represent the complexities and complications of the bigger picture and larger processes at hand, and illuminate how systems of discrimination and destruction function. They can also highlight how genocide and other mass atrocities do not end with the height of violence, and the challenges this poses to recovery and reconciliation.

The danger with the use of first hand testimonies is that they offer an individual account. We need to think more critically of how to use quotations and firsthand testimony comparatively to teach students about processes and themes so they understand both the universal and the particular. Looking at genocide comparatively is important to understanding genocide as a phenomenon, and what the motives and processes of genocide have in common to produce such violence. This is important to teaching students about how they can be involved in genocide prevention.

Quote Activity Description

- Prepare slips with individual quotes from those impacted by genocide. Ideally have the quotes represent those who were at similar stages of their lives as students when they experienced genocide to allow students to better connect. For example: Anne Frank, survivors of Canada's residential school system
- Give each student one quote when they enter the classroom, accompanied by a list of key terms they have been or will be learning about in the classroom.
- Provide students with 2-3 questions to think about and ask them to jot down notes as they read their quote to themselves quietly. For example:
 - What is your quote about?
 - What themes/processes of violence do you think it connects to?
 - How does the case of genocide that your quote is discussing fit within the UN's definition of genocide?
- Have students break up into pairs or small groups and compare their quotes and cases of genocide
- Bring the class together to discuss and reflect on the quotes as a group
- This could be used to preface a discussion introducing genocide and human rights, or to wrap up a lecture and reflect on the impacts of genocide and other mass atrocities.

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List of quotes that could be used in the classroom, divided by potential themes

Deportation and Dehumanization

"Our many Jewish friends and acquaintances are being taken away by the dozen. These people are treated by the Gestapo without a shred of decency, being loaded into cattle trucks and sent to Westerbok, the big Jewish camp near Drente" -Anne Frank

"It is terrible outside. Day and night more of those miserable people are being dragged off, with nothing but a rucksack and a little money. On the way they are deprived even of these possessions. Families are torn apart, the men, women, and children are all being separated. Children coming home from school find that their parents have disappeared. Women return from shopping to find their homes shut up and their families gone" -Anne Frank

"I remember my parents had to get us all ready and they had to get - I don't remember actually how we got from our Reserve to go to Hodson. We had to go to Hodson, Manitoba, and that's where the Residential School truck was there to pick us up. It was just a three-ton truck with a box around it and wooden seats on each side. If you were lucky enough to be one of the first ones getting in the truck you would get a seat but otherwise you would have to sit on the floor or stand up all the way from Hodson to Brandon. That was probably a good four and a half hour drive, or something like that." -Matilda Mallett, Residential School Survivor

Identity

"Rauter, one of the German big shots, has made a speech. "All Jews must be out of the German-occupied countries before July 1. Between April 1 and May 1 the province of Utrecht must be cleaned out [as if the Jews were cockroaches]. Between May 1 and June 1 the provinces of North and South Holland." These wretched people are sent to filthy slaughterhouses like a herd of sick, neglected cattle." -Anne Frank

"We have been pointedly reminded that we are in hiding, that we are Jews in chains, chained to one spot, without any rights, but with a thousand duties. We Jews mustn't show our feelings, must be brave and strong, must accept all inconveniences and not grumble, must do what is within our power and trust in God. Sometime this terrible war will be over. Surely the time will come when we are people again, and not just Jews." -Anne Frank

"Then there were times I was lonesome for my parents. I would be crying, of course, and wondering if I'll ever see them again or if I'll ever go home again, or if I was going to be there forever. [...] when the first summer holiday came along after we were there for ten months I went home and I guess I felt totally different. I felt different. I didn't feel like it was my family any more. [...] I couldn't seem to connect back with my mother or father. I think my mother and father also went through a lot too, with their children being sent away. I think that's why they started drinking more [...]." -Matilda Mallett

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Identity

"That's where I had the most difficulty in school because I didn't understand English. My hand was hit because I wrote on my scribbles, the scribbles that were given on starting school, pencils, erasers, rulers and that, scribbles, and textbooks that were given. "Write your names," she said, so they don't get lost. But I wrote on my scribbles in Cree syllabics. And so I got the nun really mad that I was writing in Cree. And then I only knew my name was Ministik from the first time I heard my name, my name was Ministik. So I was whipped again because I didn't know my name was Peter Nakogee." -**Peter Nakogee, Residential School Survivor, Fort Albany, ON school**

Violence

"Countless friends and acquaintances have gone to a terrible fate. Evening after evening the green and gray army lorries trundle past. The Germans ring at every front door to inquire if there are any Jews living in the house. If there are, then the whole family has to go at once. If they don't find any, they go onto the next house. No one has a chance of evading them unless one goes into hiding. Often they go around with lists, and only ring when they know they can get a good haul. Sometimes they let them off for cash—so much per head. It seems like the slave hunts of olden times. [...] No one is spared—old people, babies, expectant mothers, the sick—each and all join in the march of death." -**Anne Frank**

"I hear nothing but this sort of talk all day, invasion nothing but invasion, arguments about suffering from hunger, dying, bombs, fire extinguishers, sleeping bags, Jewish vouchers, poisonous gases etc., etc." -Anne Frank

"Of course I don't remember too much of what we ate except for all our bread, it was dunked in grease. We didn't have butter or anything like that but they had a big pail of melted grease. [...] They were very strict too about our posture when we were sitting at the tables. The Matron would be going in between the rows of tables and if anybody was slouched over she would whack them on the back and tell them to straighten up and sit right." -**Matilda Mallett, Residential School Survivor**

"I was speaking out of turn and there was a male supervisor, I was about fourteen, maybe thirteen. He was a male supervisor, he was big, he came up to me and instead of talking to me in a nice way, he just ploughed into my ear like this. Today I wear hearing aids... Today I can't hear, I can't hear well enough. And that really hurt because there was nobody there to say, "I'm sorry," because everybody was scared. Nobody wanted to say anything but I felt it. I felt the blow and again I cried." -**Inez Dieter, Residential School Survivor**

"We cried to have something good to eat before we sleep. A lot of the times the food we had was rancid, full of maggots, stink. Sometimes we would sneak away from school to go visit our aunts or uncles just to have a piece of bannock" -**Andrew Paul, Residential School Survivor, Roman Catholic School in Aklavik**

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“Us Vs. Them”/Group Thinking

“To our great horror and regret we hear the attitude of a great many people towards us Jews has changed. We hear that there is anti-Semitism now in circles that never thought of it before. This news has affected us all very deeply.” -**Anne Frank** **Included in virtual presentation*

“I have always worked. I have never ever been unemployed. I worked every day that was my day to work. I worked. I know I did drink alcohol, but I never let it take over because I always heard, every place I worked, “it’s payday today, she’ll go out and get drunk and she’ll not come in to work the next day”. That’s what people would say. So I said that I’m going to let them know that I’m not going to go out and get drunk and not show up for work! I always made sure that I showed up for work [...] I used to just hate it when they used to say that to me.” -**Matilda Mallett** **Included in virtual presentation*

“It wasn’t a good experience. ‘Cause this was my first time too, going to the white system with the white kids and we weren’t treated very well there. We got called down quite a bit. They use to call us squaws and neechies, and dirty Indian, you know. They’d drive by in their cars and say awful things to us. Even the girls didn’t associate with us, the white girls, they didn’t associate with us.” -**Emily Kematch, Residential School Survivor - on integration into public schools**