

Guided Reading Questions and Transcript for The Century with Peter Jennings

Directions: Show the clip on the Armenian Genocide from The Century with Peter Jennings and answer the following questions. The transcript of the broadcast is below.*

1. What two genocides are being compared in the first part of the clip?
2. Beginning in 1915, how was the Armenian population destroyed?
3. What else was occurring in the world in 1915?
4. Why was violence used against the Armenians?
5. What happened in 1908 that brought temporary hope to the Armenians?
6. What does “Pan Turkic” mean?
7. List two comparisons made between the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust.
8. Who was Armin Wegner and what did he do in response to the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust?
9. How many Armenians perished in the Armenian Genocide?
10. Where did the genocide occur?
11. What did Hitler say about the Armenian Genocide? What is Peter Jennings implying by ending the clip with the quote by Hitler?

Bonus Questions:

- a. Peter Jennings states that the Armenian Genocide was the first genocide of the 20th Century but that is incorrect. What was the first genocide of the 20th Century?
- b. The term “Turkish” is used throughout the clip. What word could be used in its place and could be, arguable, more correct?

* The video clip can be downloaded from www.TeachGenocide.org or ordered from The Genocide Education Project (51 Commonwealth Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94118, (415) 264-4203, info@GenocideEducation.org).

The Century

PETER JENNINGS

ABC News: World News Tonight

04/30/1999

“THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE”

PETER JENNINGS: Finally tonight, "The Century On Friday." Listen to this from The New York Times. "A considerable population is in danger. Ravaged by sickness and privations of every kind, by outrages including murder, refugees robbed of everything they possessed."

Does it sound like the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo? Actually, it's from an article 84 years ago about the forgotten genocide.

(Voice-over) Tonight, the Armenian massacre-

(Voice-over) Mary Omartian has a question for God.

MARY OMARTIAN: If there is -- there is God in the heaven; someday we are going to ask a question to him, why? What did we do that you caused all this trouble?

PETER JENNINGS: (voice-over) It is sometimes called "the Armenian Holocaust." And one of its perpetrators, Talaat Pasha, is known to Armenians as the Turkish Hitler. Look at what is happening now to the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, and you can follow a line that leads, finally, here. To the near annihilation of the Turkish Armenians in 1915—It was, quite simply, the first genocide of the 20th century.

JAY WINTER, Historian: The Turkish ruling elite proceeded to destroy the Armenian population, two million people, and this was done by massacre. It was done by deportation. It was done by rape, plunder, murder of the most appalling kinds.

PETER JENNINGS: (voice-over) As the century began, the Ottoman Empire was collapsing. The Turks, who were Muslims, were being pushed out of the Balkans, where their Christian subjects were in open rebellion. And inside Turkey, two million Christian Armenians were demanding better treatment.

PETER BALAKIAN, Author, "Black Dog of Fate": As Armenians continued to agitate for change; they were met with more and more violence.

PETER JENNINGS: (voice-over) There was some hope when a new regime called the "Young Turks" took power in 1908, promising freedom and equality for all ethnic minorities. But they broke their promises. And in the name of a new Turkish empire, they moved viciously against the Armenians.

PETER BALAKIAN: A little bit like Hitler's idea of an Aryan society, so that Turkey would be a place only possible for Turkish Muslim people. And the Armenians represented the greatest threat, in the Turkish mind, to this pan-Turkic ideal.

PETER JENNINGS: (voice-over) When Turkey then became involved in the First World War on the side of the Germans; the Turkish leadership arrived at yet another reason to be rid of the Armenians. They feared that Armenians would fight against them with their Christian Orthodox Russian neighbors to the east.

The plan to destroy the Armenian population began 84 years ago this week, with the deportation and eventual murder of the Armenian cultural elite.

PEROUZE IPEKJIAN: I was only 12 years old, and they took all my schoolteachers away. They never came back.

PETER JENNINGS: (voice-over) The Turkish authorities then turned to the remainder of the civilian population, starving some, burning others. Armenian women tried to avoid rape by burying themselves up to their necks in sand. The Turks herded people into caves and then set brush fires at the mouth of the caves -- primitive gas chambers.

PETER BALAKIAN: That way, hundreds of people could be asphyxiated in one fell swoop.

PETER JENNINGS: (voice-over) Armin Wegner, a German army medic, was so sickened by what he saw that he secretly photographed what was done so it could not be hidden from the world.

(Recorded voice-over of Armin Wegner) "Hunger, death, despair shout at me from all sides. The desert has devoured them."

PETER JENNINGS: (voice-over) Wegner's pictures were one of the reasons the victors of World War I gave Armenians a state of their own. The Turks denied genocide, and they deny it still.

Now follow the line forward. In the 1930s, when the Nazis began their reign of terror, Wegner wrote to Hitler, imploring him to leave the Jews alone. Already planning genocide of his own, Hitler declared, "Who remembers what happened to the Armenians now?"

(on camera) More than 1.5 million Armenians died, and there is much more information about this on our Web site, thecentury.com [no longer available], including all of the photographs taken by Armin Wegner [www.armenian-genocide.org has a selection of the photographs taken by Wegner] more than 80 years ago.

That is our report on World News Tonight. I'm Peter Jennings. Good night.

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