THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

ORIGINS, GENOCIDE, AND AFTERMATH
ORIGINS OF GENOCIDE

- Armenians are a predominantly Christian minority in the mostly Muslim population of the Ottoman Empire. They were second class citizens that did not have the same rights as others in the Empire.

- Throughout the years of 1800-1924, the Ottoman Empire lost 70% of its European population and 85% of European Territory. The Empire began to crumble. The loss of land led to a crisis of self-esteem and humiliation. The great Muslim superiority and power were disintegrating.

- The loss of power and land fueled distrust and dislike of Christians, especially those inside the Ottoman Empire, including the Armenians.
The Ottoman Empire also felt threatened by the outside European Powers involving themselves in internal affairs of the Ottoman state, such as imposing protectorates for non-Muslim inhabitants. This was thought as an attack on their sovereignty.

Armenians became the scapegoat for the slow deterioration of the Empire. They believed Christians wanted to carve up the empire with foreign powers and force themselves into positions of power.

A series of regional revolts began to spring up against the government. This revolt was suppressed by Ottoman sultan Abdul Hamid II from 1894 – 1896, and he murdered 200,000 Armenians in massacres.

A group of army officers called the “Young Turks” overthrew the sultan in 1908. At first, this seemed like a win for the Armenian people. Unfortunately, three new leaders in 1913 named Enver Pasha, Jemal Pasha, and Talaat Pasha were militant nationalists who began planning a mass extermination of all Armenians.
THE SPARK FOR GENOCIDE

- The plan for genocide had the opportunity to be put in place during World War I. Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey opposed the forces of the Britain, India, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France and Russia.

- During the Battle of Sarikamish (in Turkey), the Russians defeated the Turkish/Ottoman Army. The Turks needed a scapegoat and claimed the Armenians were on the side of the Russians and were traitors. This sparked the genocide!

“Young Turks”
On April 24, 1915, 600 Armenian community leaders, intellectuals, businessmen and professional were forcibly taken from their homes and sent to be killed.

Armenian men who were part of the Ottoman army were forced from their ranks and sent to be laborers.

Anyone who did not die of illness, overwork, exhaustion, disease, or starvation were shot and killed into mass graves that they had been forced to dig.

The rest of the Armenian population were divided and deported to other countries. Adult and teenaged men were separated from women, children, and the elderly. The men were murdered, while the women, children, and elderly were forced to walk for weeks out of the country. They had no food and were assaulted by soldiers and villagers who participated in the genocide. Women sometimes were offered a chance of survival if they married a Turk and converted to Islam. Many women killed themselves and their children to escape the violence.

In the end, 1.1 – 1.8 million Armenian people were murdered, which was between ½ and ¾ of the entire population of the Ottoman Armenians.
REFLECTION ACTIVITY

French philosopher Jean Baudrillard said, “Forgetting the extermination is part of the extermination itself.”

Create a response to this quote in two ways.

1. One, in a journal entry, respond to what you think this quote means and what you think it means in the context of the Armenian genocide specifically.

2. Second, think of ways that we remember victims of genocide and mass atrocities. There are many ways that people commemorate such acts: through memorials, physical monuments, poetry, songs, tribute cards, etc. Research one example of a tribute to a genocide or mass atrocity of your choice. Create a visual presentation for your class that answers the following questions:
   1. What tribute did you choose (a monument, a poem, etc.)?
   2. What is this tribute memorializing (a natural disaster, a genocide, war, etc.)?
   3. How does the medium of the tribute respect and honor the victims? Why do you think the artist chose this medium?
   4. Why did you choose this tribute? What lessons do you think it can show the rest of the world?
