

THE POWER OF WORDS TO WITNESS

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRESS



HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
DAY TRUST

This discussion resource has been designed specifically for those interested in journalism who are aged 16 years and older, and discusses issues surrounding:

- The journalist as a witness to a genocide or similar atrocity
- The responsibility of the press
- The impact of a journalist's choice of words

Please note that this resource makes reference to violence, mass murder and systematic rape.



YOU WILL NEED:

- *The power of words to witness* PowerPoint presentation
- Christiane Amanpour's life story (one per person)
- Fact sheet on the Genocide in Bosnia (one per person)

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE:

This activity would work well for an adult learning group, university group, student magazine or Key Stage 5 journalism class with some basic background knowledge of what genocide is.



This resource has been created by Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, the charity that promotes and supports Holocaust Memorial Day across the UK.

This activity explores the experience of the journalist Christiane Amanpour reporting on the Genocide in Bosnia in 1994.

This flexible resource provides a range of suggested activities for you to explore some or all of the below learning objectives, over one session or several.

Slides	Content	Approximate time	Learning objective
1-3	Introduction	5 minutes	General
4	Background information on the Genocide in Bosnia and questions	10 minutes	Identify the key stages of the Genocide in Bosnia
5-8	Christiane Amanpour's experiences and viewpoints and her questions to Bill Clinton	20+ minutes	Consider the experiences of Christiane Amanpour as a reporter during the Genocide in Bosnia in 1994
9-11	The definition of genocide	15 minutes	Analyse the meaning and importance of the word 'genocide'
12-13	What is the role of a journalist witnessing a genocide? Discussion plus optional extension debate activity	15 minutes	Discuss the possible responses of journalists who witness genocide, mass atrocities, war crimes or human rights violations
14-15	How are words used in the media today?	10 minutes	Make links between what you have learnt and contemporary journalism
16	Plenary	5 minutes	General

(Slide 1) Introduction

(Slide 2) What this session will cover

(Slide 3) Holocaust Memorial Day

Each year on 27 January we mark Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD), to remember:

- the six million Jewish people who were systematically persecuted and murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators during the Holocaust.
- the Nazis' other victims, including Roma and Sinti people, disabled people, gay people, political opponents and many others who faced persecution and death at the hands of the Nazis.
- the millions of men, women and children, who have been murdered in the genocides which followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

(Slide 4) – Background information

Hand out the fact sheet about the Genocide in Bosnia.

Display the questions in the presentation and ask students to find the answers in the fact sheet – individually or in pairs.

Discuss the information you have learnt.

Extension activity if you have more time:

Learn about the Genocide in Bosnia through the experiences of a survivor. Download Sedin Mustafić's life story at hmd.org.uk/sedin

(Slide 5) Christiane Amanpour

Hand out Christiane Amanpour's life story to the group. Read it individually or in groups, and discuss.

(Slide 6) Discussion point one - objectivity

Read and discuss the quote from Amanpour regarding objectivity. Discussion questions are provided on the slide.

(Slide 7) Discussion point two - criticism

On 5 February 1994, Markale Market – an open-air marketplace in Sarajevo, was shelled for the first time, killing 68 people and wounding a further 144.

This was the first of two bombings of this market square. The second attack, on 28 August 1995 was the stated reason for the NATO air strikes that would ultimately end the Bosnian War.

On 9 October 1994, Stephen Kinzer of The New York Times published an article criticising Amanpour's coverage of the Bosnian War. Kinzer quoted a colleague of Amanpour's (who wished to remain anonymous) describing Amanpour reporting on the first bombing at Markale marketplace:

'[Christiane Amanpour] was sitting in Belgrade when that marketplace massacre happened, and she went on the air to say that the Serbs had probably done it. There was no way she could have known that. She was assuming an omniscience which no journalist has.'

This was criticised at the time as an example of 'advocate journalism':

Advocacy journalism is a genre of **journalism** that intentionally and transparently adopts a non-objective viewpoint, usually for some social or political purpose. Because it is intended to be factual, it is distinguished from propaganda.

Discuss this moment using the questions provided on the slide.

(Slide 8) Amanpour questioning President of the United States, Bill Clinton

At the CNN forum in 1994, Amanpour had the opportunity to ask President Bill Clinton a question by live video link from Sarajevo.

Clinton had made promises about intervening in Bosnia as part of his presidential campaign, and Amanpour's question suggests that he has not done enough.

Clinton's response lists his actions to date. This section gets a little complex, so if you would rather focus on Amanpour's question itself you can pause the video at 1.37.

Watch the clip of Amanpour questioning the President of the United States, Bill Clinton, and the clip of her reflecting on this moment later in her career.

(**Please note** that these video clips are embedded from YouTube so you will need an internet connection to be able to play them.)

Questions to discuss together or in small groups:

- Why did Amanpour's question make Clinton angry?
- What motivated Amanpour to ask this question?
- What impact do you think Amanpour hoped to have?
- Do you think journalists have a responsibility to try and influence the decision making of political leaders?

(Slide 9) Activity – The definition of genocide

Journalists don't always know in advance that they are going to witness a genocide. Amanpour was in Bosnia from 1991 to cover the war, and witnessed the situation developing from civil war into ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Due to this role as a witness and the fact that they have a communication platform, journalists are often the first people to suggest that a situation may be defined as a genocide.

This can lead to investigations starting and the involvement of the International Criminal Court. It is therefore important for journalists to have a clear understanding of the legal definition of the word genocide, and use the word responsibly.

Divide into small groups. You have five minutes to discuss:

- What do you think is included in the definition of the word 'genocide'?
- When do you think this word was invented?

(Slide 10) Raphael Lemkin

Use the information on the slide to learn about Raphael Lemkin and how he coined the word genocide.

You can learn more about Raphael Lemkin in our life story about him at hmd.org.uk/lemkin.

(Slide 11) The legal definition

Read aloud the official definition of genocide.

Use the questions on the slide to discuss how close your ideas were.

Answers to '*What criticisms might be brought against this definition?*' may include:

- 'Intention' can be difficult to prove in court, especially in the context of a war.
- Not all possible targeted groups are included in the definitions 'national, ethnical, racial or religious' – for example, political groups, those targeted for reasons such as sexuality or physical disabilities.

(Slide 12) Discussion activity

Based on our earlier discussions of Amanpour's approaches in Bosnia, and criticisms brought against her, discuss your answers to the starter question: *What is the role of a journalist during a genocide?*

(Slide 13)

Reveal some examples of possible answers to this question, then use the further questions on the slide to support students to develop their ideas about the role of the journalist in a genocide situation. This may lead to some debate.

Extension question if you have more time:

What are the ethics of photographing violent situations?

You could divide the group into two debating teams and ask them to research and build an argument for and against the use of photo-journalism in violent situations, and hold a debate. This could include looking at examples of iconic photographs and their impact.

(Slide 14 and 15) How are words used in the media today?

What does this mean for UK-based journalists today?

Not many journalists will find themselves in the situation of witnessing a genocide, but there are things we can learn from Amanpour's story that apply to the media today.

The path to genocide begins with the use of discriminatory and dehumanising language, targeting a particular group on the basis of their identity. You can read more about the path to genocide at hmd.org.uk/path-genocide.

Therefore, the choice of words used by journalists can have real power, and can have positive and negative impact on events and public opinion. Some factors affecting word choice can be:

- The journalist's own unconscious bias
- Pressure from superiors (for example, the pressure to sell newspapers)
- The level of understanding of a culture or group
- Fear following an event or of a particular group

Discuss examples under each category given, where journalists' words might be used in this way. Click to **Slide 15** to reveal some examples.

Discuss with the group the responsibility of journalists to use words carefully. How could this word choice have an impact when:

- Describing groups of people
- Describing world events – attention-grabbing versus fear-mongering
- Telling a story – the importance of telling stories through real people's experiences
- Giving a balance of different viewpoints

(Slide 16) Plenary

Ask students to consolidate their learning with a 3 – 2 – 1 recap:

3 things you have learned that you didn't know before

2 questions you want to ask Christiane Amanpour

1 thing you will look into further

These can be shared in pairs or groups.

TAKE THE LEARNING FURTHER:

Organise an activity to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day as a group. Start by ordering a free activity pack at hmd.org.uk. You can also find lots of resources and support on our website to get you started.

Read more life stories, including from survivors of the Genocide in Bosnia, at: hmd.org.uk/lifestories.

Find out more...

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust: hmd.org.uk

Order an activity pack or resources: hmd.org.uk/activitypack

Resources for educators: hmd.org.uk/educators

FACT SHEET - THE GENOCIDE IN BOSNIA

The population of Bosnia and Herzegovina (referred to as 'Bosnia' here) consists of:

- **Bosniaks** (Bosnian Muslims)
- **Bosnian Serbs** (Serb Orthodox Christians who have close cultural ties with neighbouring Serbia)
- **Bosnian Croats** (Roman Catholics who have close cultural ties with neighbouring Croatia).



Between 1991-1994 Yugoslavia disintegrated into five states – Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (later known as Serbia and Montenegro).



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Bosnia declared independence in 1992. This was resisted by the Bosnian Serb population who saw their future as part of 'Greater Serbia', sparking a civil war.

Bosnia became the victim of the Bosnian Serbs' wish for political domination, which they were prepared to achieve by isolating ethnic groups and, if necessary, exterminating them.

ETHNIC CLEANSING DURING THE BOSNIAN WAR

A campaign of war crimes, 'ethnic cleansing' and genocide was perpetrated by Bosnian Serb troops under the orders of Slobodan Milošević.

Prijedor

From 1991, in the north-western Bosnian municipality of Prijedor, non-Serbs were forced to wear white armbands and newspapers and radio stations began to broadcast anti-Croat and anti-Bosniak propaganda.

Non-Serbs were sent to concentration camps which had been set up by the ruling Serbs in mid-1992. Women were taken to Trnopolje camp where systematic rape took place on a regular basis. It is estimated that around 7,000 people passed through the camp.

Around 3,500 people, mainly men, were held in inhumane conditions in the Omarska Camp. The prisoners were given one meal per day and violence from the camp officers was widespread. Living conditions were atrocious, with suffocation caused by overcrowding being a constant threat to the prisoners. The camp was closed in August 1992 after a visit from foreign journalists.

The Siege of Sarajevo

Sarajevo, the capital city of Bosnia was the scene of the longest siege in modern warfare. From April 1992 to February 1996, the city was encircled by the Serb-controlled army. Civilians endured shelling of their city for nearly four years. The Bosnian Serbs burnt down and destroyed cultural monuments, public meeting spaces and the National Library in the city.

SREBRENICA

(pronounced Sre-bre-nits-a)

The Bosnian town of Srebrenica was a key area that the Serbs wanted to gain control of, to create a continuous state of 'Greater Serbia'.

On 16 April 1993, the United Nations Security Council declared that Srebrenica was a 'safe area' and called for the area to be free from armed attacks. In spite of this regular shelling continued from the Bosnian Serbs.

In 1995 tens of thousands of non-Serbs had taken refuge in Srebrenica from Serbian attacks in the north-east of Bosnia.

The refugees were under the protection of Dutch UN troops, and fresh food and water were in short supply.

When shelling close to refugee centres in Srebrenica began, the Dutch commander Thom Karremans called UN headquarters requesting 'close air support'. As shelling intensified, more refugees from camps in the south fled to the town.

In July 1995, Bosnian Serb troops and paramilitaries led by Ratko Mladić entered the town and a genocidal massacre took place.

Around 8,000 Bosnian Muslims were murdered. The victims were mostly men, ranging from teenagers to the elderly, however, there were instances of the murder of young children and women.

The massacre at Srebrenica was one of the most horrific events of the war in the former Balkan States. It remains the single largest mass murder in Europe since World War Two.

Thousands of bodies were buried in mass graves. Some of the bodies have been recovered and reburied, but identification has proved extremely difficult.