



## ***The Promise***

### **Exploring Resistance: Concepts of Revenge and Nonviolent Protest**

This lesson plan accompanies the feature film, *The Promise*, made available to teachers for classroom use by the film's producers. Teachers can contact The Genocide Education Project to request a DVD of the film.

#### **Introduction**

*The Promise* follows the lives of three people through World War I and the Armenian Genocide. Written and directed by Terry George (*Hotel Rwanda*), the story traces the experiences of an American journalist (Chris), his Armenian wife (Ana) who has just returned from studying in Paris, and an Armenian man (Michael), from a provincial village, recently arrived in Constantinople to attend medical school. As the war intensifies, they are each drawn to the eastern



territories of the Ottoman Empire, where the Turkish government is carrying out a plan to annihilate the Armenians, the largest minority population there, having inhabited the land for thousands of years prior to the arrival of Turks.

Chris, Ana, and Michael find themselves in the midst of one of the most famous moments of resistance during the Armenian Genocide—the resistance at Musa Dagh (“Mountain of Moses” in Turkish; “Musa Ler”, in Armenian). With few provisions and scant weapons, 4,000 Armenian villagers organized a defense of their community against the deportation edicts issued by the Turkish regime. They were able to ward off Turkish forces for 53 days, before being rescued by French ships and taken to Egypt.

In a moment of desperation after the last of his family members dies, Michael tells Ana of his thoughts of revenge. Ana convinces him to fight for their lives, saying, “Our revenge will be to survive.”

#### **Lesson Plan**

- I. Arrange for the class to watch the film “The Promise” and read [“A Brief History of the Armenian Genocide.”](#)
- II. Ask students to answer the following questions regarding Musa Dagh:
  1. Describe what occurred at Musa Dagh;

2. What type of resistance was this?
  3. Is there a place for this type of resistance during genocide or a human rights disaster? Defend your answer with other historical examples.
- III. Guide students through an exploration of the concepts of revenge and nonviolent protest:
1. Ask students to write down their definition of “revenge”, including an example of an act of revenge they recall;
  2. Present the origin and definition of the word “revenge” for the students:

## **Revenge:**

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/revenge>

### **Origin**

Late Middle English: from Old French *revencher*, from late Latin *revindicare*, from *re-* (expressing intensive force) + *vindicare* ‘claim, avenge’.

### **Definition**

The action of hurting or harming someone in return for an injury or wrong suffered at their hands.

3. Divide students into small groups to discuss their definitions and their examples of revenge. They should consider how their definition was similar or different from the one given. Ask each group to:
  - a. record a definition of the word and an example they can agree on;
  - b. provide three synonyms for “revenge”
4. Share with students the quote from the film that the character Ana says to Michael as he ponders revenge: “Our revenge will be to survive.” Students can discuss these questions within their groups:
  - a. How is the word “revenge” used in this context?
  - b. Is this use compatible with the definition students have created? What is different about it?
  - c. Why would the writer choose the word “revenge”?
  - d. In this instance, is revenge a form of resistance? If so, what kind?
  - e. Compare the resistance of Musa Dagh and the idea that survival can be revenge.
5. Ask the groups to share their observations with the rest of the class.
6. Conclude the lesson by assigning the following essay question for homework:

After exploring concepts of resistance and revenge in the context of the Armenian Genocide, can revenge be an act of resistance? Support your answer with historical details from the Armenian Genocide and other historical and/or personal examples.