



Operation Nemesis

Using a murder trial to teach about the Armenian Genocide

by Manuel Lopez, 2022 GenEd Teacher Fellow
Everett Alvarez High School, Salinas, CA
manuel.lopez@salinasuhd.org

Objective: Students will serve as jurors in the 1921 murder trial of Soghomon Tehlirian, as a means of understanding the Armenian Genocide, the legacy of genocide denial, and concepts of justice.

Soghomon Tehlirian, a survivor of the Armenian Genocide, assassinated Talaat Pasha in Berlin in 1921. Talaat, Minister of the Interior of the Ottoman Empire and mastermind of the Armenian Genocide, had fled Turkey after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire after WWI and was living in Germany where he continued to labor for Pan-Turkism. He had been tried in absentia by the Turkish authorities and sentenced to death for the atrocities he planned and carried out, But no official effort had been made to apprehend him and bring him to justice.

After Talaat's assassination in Berlin, Soghomon Tehlirian, who admitted committing the murder, was given a jury trial. During the two-day trial, expert witnesses and eye-witnesses testified not only about the murder itself, but about the details of the Armenian Genocide and Tehlirian's physical and mental condition as the only survivor in his family. The jury acquitted Tehlirian of the crime. He eventually moved to the United States and lived out his years in San Francisco. Years later, it was learned that the assassination of Talaat Pasha was part of a covert plan code-named "Operation Nemesis" to assassinate the leading Turkish perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide.

Students will write an opinion paper explaining whether Soghomon Tehlirian was justified in his actions or guilty of murder and deserving of punishment.

Anticipatory Set: Before the lesson, assign a one page overview for homework of the Armenian Genocide so the students have background on the lesson. (Enclosed are three possible options. Please select another if you prefer.)

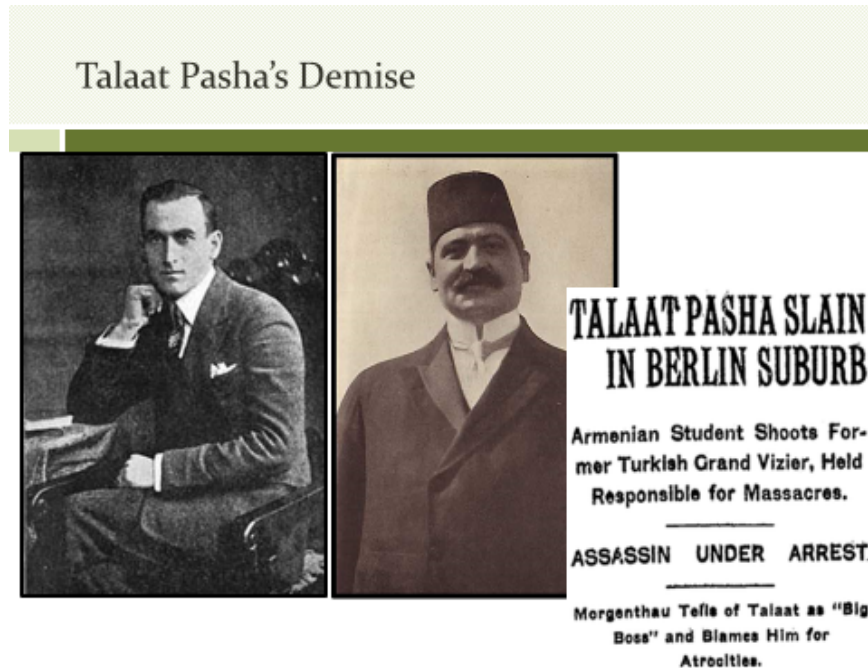
Warm Up:

1. As students enter the class, give each student one or two jigsaw puzzles pieces. Use a jigsaw puzzle of 24 pieces or less. Give other pieces that do not match with the main image. Keep 3-4 pieces out of the main image to make your point.
2. Ask students to write a story of what they think the puzzle depicts based on the piece (or pieces) they have.
3. Ask students to share their ideas about the puzzle with a partner. (Students will likely feel frustrated that they don't have enough information for a clear picture.)
4. 4-6 students will come to the front of the class to complete the puzzle. Display a picture of the fully completed puzzle.
(There will be extra pieces that do not correspond. There will also be missing pieces of the main image.)
5. With a partner, students analyze how a historian might grapple with real historical evidence when the entire story isn't known. Call on volunteers to share their thoughts.
6. Remind the class to think about this activity as they work on the day's lesson.

Introduction To Lesson: As a primer to the lesson, students will watch a 6 minute video clip of the movie **MUNICH**: bit.ly/3IRMFqm

1. As students watch the movie clip, ask them to respond to the following questions to their best abilities. (**Write the questions on the board.**):
 - Why was the man being followed?
 - Why do you think he was shot?
 - Why do you think the gunman wanted the man to know he was there to kill him?
 - What is one question you would ask if you were the policeman investigating this "crime"?
 - Why do you think the word "crime" is in quotations?
2. Briefly discuss the responses to the clip. If you watch the movie, you can let the class know:
 - a. The team of assassins were state-sponsored
 - b. The assassins were all professional
 - c. The assassins were there for retribution
 - d. "The Hunt" went on for a period of time

Transition: Students will learn about a plan to assassinate the leading architect of the Armenian Genocide. The assassination took place three years after World War I ended. This is a story of what took place on March 15, 1921.



The Lesson: Students will read a newspaper article about a murder in Berlin on March 15, 1921. Students will then analyze various documents to help them consider whether Soghomon Tehlirian was justified in his actions. The students will derive their conclusion by participating in a jigsaw activity.

1. Pass out a copy of the newspaper article from March 15, 1921.
2. As the students read the newspaper article, they are to come up with three questions.
3. When done, they'll form into groups of four to discuss their questions.
4. Respond to some of the questions immediately, and respond to others after the lesson.
5. Ask students: How is this story similar to the story of the movie clip we watched earlier? Call on students to see if they are able to make connections.

Sample questions:

1. Who was Talaat Pasha?
2. Who was Soghomon Tehlirian?
3. Looking at his face, what kind of a person might Soghomon Tehlirian have been?
4. Did Soghomon Tehlirian act alone?
5. What evidence did Soghomon Tehlirian want to submit?
6. What was the Armenian Genocide?

7. Why did the trial only last two days?
8. Why was Talaat Pasha tried in absentia by the Turkish authorities after the war and sentenced to death?
9. Why was Soghomon Tehlirian acquitted of murder?

Jigsaw Activity: After the students discuss questions from the newspaper article, they will engage in the jigsaw activity. In groups, the students will piece together the story that Tehlirian wanted to convey to the court.

Roles for Team Members:

1. Facilitator
2. Time Keeper
3. Team Captain
4. Group Ambassador
5. Presenter
6. Presenter

Directions for Jigsaw Activity:

1. Count how many students are in the class to determine how many primary documents you'll use.
2. Divide students into groups of six. If there are 36 students in class, divide the students into groups of six.
3. The groups of six are the base groups. This means that the teacher will only use six primary documents. Each group member will become an expert on one document.
4. Once students are in their base groups count them off, 1-6.
5. All the number 1s from each group will go to a designated area. Make sure that all 1s, 2s, 3s, 4s, 5s, & 6s are grouped together.
6. Assign a primary source from the packet to each group.
7. Each student reads, annotates, and writes a summary of their document.
8. Students take turns reading their document to their group.
9. As a team, each group pares down their summary to one standard version that each team member will take back to their base group along with a group analysis of the document.
10. Students write their summary on one side of an index card. On the back of the index card the students write the group's thoughts and analysis that will be shared with the base group.
11. When each team has their copy, send all students to their base group.
12. When in the base group, each student takes a turn reading their summary out loud to the group with an analysis of their document.
13. After the students are done reading, they deliberate on whether Soghomon Tehlirian was justified in his actions or should be convicted of murder..

14. Divide the class in two. Ask students who believe Soghomon Tehlirian is guilty to move to one side of the group while those who think he was justified move to the other side. The question is: Was Soghomon Tehlirian justified in his assassination of Talat Pasha and rightly should not have received punishment, or should he have been punished like any other defendant found to have committed murder?
15. Ask various students to justify their reasoning based on what was learned.
16. After this, the students will return to their seats to begin writing their opinion paper.

Ticket-out-the-Door: Ask students to read the following excerpt. The students are to highlight 3-5 adjectives in the excerpt below and determine whether the author of the text was in favor of Tehlirian's conviction or acquittal. They will write 2-3 sentences justifying their response:

The Tehlirian trial posed questions of moral and legal rights to the young jurist, who was motivated by the need to define the crime of mass murder. It was the first time a foreign court had dealt with the Young Turks' genocide against the Armenians. Hofmann summarized the trial proceedings, stressing the German government's desire to conclude quickly and to avoid a political trial by focusing attention on Tehlirian's psychological condition.

Assessment: Students will take a stand: They will write their opinion as a juror justifying the murder of Talat Pasha or advocating for the conviction of Soghomon Tehlirian. Students will cite information from three sources.

Documents: Find lesson & documents below at bit.ly/3EARL7U or using QR code:

1. Blueprint for genocide
2. Turkish Officer
3. Ambassador Morgenthau
4. German Ambassador
5. Eye Witnesses
6. Armin Wegner
7. Australian Prisoners of War
8. Christian Missionaries



Document	What you found important	Group's Common Narrative
1. Blueprint for Genocide		
2. A Turkish Officer		
3. Ambassador Morgenthau		
4. German Ambassador		
5. Eye Witnesses		
6. Armin Wegner		
7. Australian Prisoners of War		
8. Christian Missionary		