

Us Vs. Them: Then and Now

Overview

Societies around the world, including in the United States, continue to create divisions within themselves. As students study the past and engage with current events, it is more important than ever to create connections between the classroom and home. This activity follows a *Discuss, Watch, Act*, format to provide support for you in linking your child's understanding of the Armenian Genocide and a contemporary look into the "us vs. them" mentality.

Did you Know?

The Armenian Genocide, which lasted from 1915 to 1923, resulted in the massacre of more than 1.5 million Armenians by the Turkish regimes of this period. It is referred to as the "prototype" for subsequent genocides. As your child learns about the Armenian Genocide, you can carry on the conversation at home by helping highlight the role "othering" or an us vs. them mentality plays in leading to genocide. For more information about the Armenian Genocide, please visit: iwitness.usc.edu.

Continuing the Conversation at Home

Discuss

In the classroom, your child has learned about the role an us vs. them mentality played in the Armenian Genocide. Help connect what they have learned to contemporary issues by highlighting spaces where an us vs. them mentality exists. While this conversation may be challenging, opening up this dialogue with your family is an important first step in building compassion and tolerance. Some helpful supports for getting your child sharing what they have learned could be:

- Discover what your child knows. Use the summary information to connect to their prior knowledge. Ask what else they want to know and research together to learn more.



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- When discussing the topic, ask open ended questions (see below) that deepen the conversation. Be careful not to judge their responses and be sure to listen thoughtfully.
- Think together about your opinions, thoughts as a family, and worldview. Discuss next steps, this can be something they do on their own or something you do together or as a family. Included at the end of this activity are meaningful ways to take action.

While the Armenian Genocide happened over 100 years ago and may seem hard to comprehend, helping your child see how some of the same mentalities that still exist can create a more critical lens to view the world.

To help, use the *Family Reflection* handout at the end of this activity to support your child in identifying where those connections may exist.

Note: These questions could be helpful to revisit over time as your child grows older or as current events arise.

- What makes us view or treat people as different from ourselves?
- How can we build bridges across differences and promote compassion and tolerance?

Watch

One way to help your child make these connections and spark empathy is through the use of testimony. To help students connect their understanding of the Armenian Genocide to issues of today, watch the following clip from [Dr. Richard Hovannisian](#) on Anti-Armenian sentiment (40:31–41:45): Richard explains that Turkish leaders used propaganda to dehumanize Armenians and convince the Muslim majority that they needed to be eliminated.

Note: For more support and strategies for using clips of testimony with your family, please visit teachingwithtestimony.com.

After watching and listening to Dr. Richard Hovannisian, consider the following questions as a family:

- Dr. Hovannisian mentions divisions being created in his society, where do you see this taking place in society today, how about your own school or community?

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- Why do you think such divisions exist?
- What can governments or schools do to address and try to bridge the division?
- What can individuals do to build bridges between different groups?

Act

Now that you and your family have engaged in making connections from school to home, consider the steps below as opportunities for your family to combat othering or an us vs. them mentality. You can also brainstorm your own ways to build compassion and tolerance!

- Find a local service project that allows you to engage with people from various backgrounds and experiences. Websites such as <https://www.volunteer.gov/> and <https://www.volunteermatch.org/> can connect you to a wide range of opportunities.
- Engaging in civil dialogue with individuals whose opinions are vastly different from your own is an important social skill. In fact, it is a tenet of a democratic society, one that must be cultivated. Review the handout *Respectful Political Dialogue* handout help further develop effective ways to engage in thoughtful and respectful dialogue. The next time you find yourself in a dialogue with someone whose beliefs differ from your own, whether it is face-to-face or in an online forum, use those guidelines.

Family Reflection Handout



FAMILY HANDOUT

Consider the following questions with your family to help link the past with the present.

What makes us view or treat people as different from ourselves?

How can we build bridges across differences and promote compassion and tolerance?

Respectful Political Dialogue Handout



FAMILY HANDOUT

Find areas where you agree. You may disagree with someone but instead of strongly reacting, actively listen to the other person about what is important to them. You may find that by discussing shared viewpoints, areas of disagreement will feel less intense and your stress may decrease.

Be open and kind. When having conversations, avoid polarizing language and personal attacks. Remember with whom you are having the conversation.

Keep calm when tensions rise. Preparing for how you might react in advance of a conversation will increase your self-awareness and may give you more options if you want to de-escalate tension. Only you can control your emotions and being aware of them will help you to lessen tension with others.

Have conversation goals. Understanding your goals when it comes to communicating with others, may be helpful to having productive conversations. Whether the conversation is on a sensitive topic it's important to determine what you hope to achieve from the conversation.

Accept that you may not change the other person's mind. When in conversation, you may notice that the other person may not agree with your opinions or statements. Having conversations, specifically on sensitive topics, will not always be easy going. Recognize that you may not be able to change their viewpoints.

Disagreeing with someone you care about is ok. It is important to remember that you are not always going to agree with everyone. It is ok to agree to disagree. Your personal opinions and beliefs make you unique.

Know when to end the conversation. If the conversation has not come to a resolution, you may want to find an appropriate time to end the discussion peacefully.

*adapted from the American Psychological Association "[Managing Conversations When You Disagree Politically](#)"