

BURMA'S PATH TO GENOCIDE

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MODERN-DAY GENOCIDE:

A Study of the Rohingya Minority in Burma

Lesson Plan and Materials

UNITED STATES
HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
MUSEUM

SIMON-SKJODT CENTER
FOR THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE

MODERN-DAY GENOCIDE: A Study of the Rohingya Minority in Burma

GRADE LEVEL: Adaptable for secondary and college students

SUBJECT: Multidisciplinary

TIME REQUIRED

60 minutes **CHAPTER I: Belonging**

60 minutes **CHAPTER II: Targeted**

60 minutes **CHAPTER III: Weakened**

60 minutes **CHAPTER IV: Destroyed**

60 minutes **CHAPTER V: Surviving**

20 minutes **CONCLUSION**

Chapter I functions as the introduction. Other chapters may be completed independently depending on desired educational outcomes.

This is a THEMATIC lesson that builds on fundamental knowledge and provides in-depth exploration of a topic.

RATIONALE

From 1948 to today, the Rohingya, a religious and ethnic minority in Burma, went from being citizens to outsiders and became the targets of a sustained campaign of genocide. By exploring the online exhibition, [Burma's Path to Genocide](#), students learn how government policies and the proliferation of hate speech led to genocide of the Rohingya. Rohingya are still under threat of genocide today.

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- In the decade after Burmese independence, how were the Rohingya recognized and included in Burmese society?
- How and why did the Burmese government slowly and deliberately redefine citizenship to exclude the Rohingya?
- What does the proliferation of anti-Rohingya hate speech in the 2010s reveal about the social and cultural environment in Burma?
- Based on survivor testimony, how did the Burmese military carry out the genocide at Maung Nu?
- Why is it important to document the genocide of the Rohingya?
- What are some of the long-term impacts for the Rohingya survivors of genocide?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

At the end of this lesson, students understand:

- For more than a decade after Burmese independence, Rohingya were included in the Burmese national identity.
- The genocide did not happen overnight—over many years the Burmese government enacted racist policies and laws that deliberately stripped Rohingya of their citizenship, other human rights, and place in society in order to create a nation that protected the Buddhist Bamar, the ethnic majority.

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- Burmese media—including social media—had a large role in dehumanizing the Rohingya and creating an atmosphere permissible for violence.
- The Burmese military committed genocide against the Rohingya; Rohingya are still under threat of genocide today.
- Listening to survivors, collecting evidence, and bearing witness affirms the humanity and dignity of the Rohingya victims of genocide and establishes a historical record to combat denial.
- Genocide has a lasting impact on individuals, communities, and nations, extending far beyond the atrocities committed.

TEACHER PREPARATION

- Explore the online exhibition *Burma's Path to Genocide* (<https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/burmas-path-to-genocide>)
- Read USHMM articles on Burma:
 - [Burma Fact Sheet](#)
 - Holocaust Encyclopedia article, [Atrocities against Burma's Rohingya Population](#)
 - USHMM [website resources](#) on Burma
- Print or download materials: [KWL Chart](#), [Timeline Handout](#), [Hate Speech Handout](#), [Documenting the Evidence Handout](#), [Photo Analysis Handout](#)
- **Recommended:** Consult trusted resources about how to have difficult conversations with students

MATERIALS

- Access to Museum content online: <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/burmas-path-to-genocide>
- Handouts
- Jamboard, Google Classroom, or similar platform (if applicable)

ONLINE INSTRUCTION MODIFICATIONS

- Technology and teaching strategies are suggested in the instructional sequence. However, the lesson is intentionally flexible to allow for individual teacher modifications to achieve the educational outcomes.
- Online/remote learning suggestions:
 - Use the break-out room feature for work in pairs or small groups
 - Collect discussion question responses on Jamboard or a similar platform

LEARNER VARIABILITY MODIFICATIONS

- Key definitions displayed on a [Wordwall](#)
- Dictionary selections geared toward reading proficiencies or include first language choices
- Write key questions on the board (or slide) and collect student responses individually
- Review key takeaways from prior chapters before entering a new chapter

60 min. CHAPTER I: BELONGING

This chapter should be completed as the lesson introduction.
Other chapters may be completed independently based on desired educational outcomes.

KEY QUESTION

- In the decade after Burmese independence, how were the Rohingya recognized and included in Burmese society?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOME

- For more than a decade after Burmese independence, Rohingya were included in the Burmese national identity.

30 min. DEFINING KEY TERMS

Introduce the online exhibition, [Burma's Path to Genocide](#). The exhibition explores how the Rohingya, a Muslim minority, went from citizens to outsiders—and became targets of a sustained campaign of violence.

Enter **Chapter I: Belonging** either by selecting the Chapters tab or selecting “Learn the History” under the section titled “History of Persecution.”

Read, or select student volunteers to read, the first four paragraphs of **Chapter I: Belonging**, beginning with “Beyond the rooftops ...” and ending with “... a larger, sustained campaign of genocide.”

Based on the context provided in this text and students’ prior knowledge, divide students into groups or pairs to prepare a working definition for the following words. Assign each group or pair one word to define.

- Refugee
- Minority Group
- Persecution
- Ethnic Nationalism
- Ethnicity
- Citizen
- Genocide

After approximately five minutes, ask one member of each group to share their working definition with the class. Write down student answers on the board or on a shared screen to create a draft of the class definitions.

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After creating class definitions, share the definitions below.

Note that some of these definitions are simplified for the purposes of this lesson plan.

- **REFUGEE:** someone who is not currently in their country of origin and unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion¹
- **MINORITY GROUP:** any group of people who, because of their physical, cultural, or other characteristics, may be singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who may therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination²
- **PERSECUTION:** a threat to life or freedom on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a particular social group³
- **ETHNIC NATIONALISM:** nationalism based on an identity group defining its members as core citizens and others as secondary ones⁴
- **ETHNICITY:** describes shared culture—the practices, values, and beliefs of a group. This culture might include shared language, religion, and traditions, among other commonalities.
- **CITIZEN:** a legally recognized subject or national of a state or commonwealth, either native or naturalized⁵
- **GENOCIDE:** means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group:
 1. Killing members of the group
 2. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
 3. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
 4. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
 5. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group⁶

Start a class discussion about the definitions provided. Ask the students if our class definitions mirror the provided definitions. If not, what do we need to add to our definitions in order to fully understand these concepts? Once the class has developed a set of definitions, re-read the first four paragraphs of **Chapter I: Belonging** as a class.

15 min. EXPLORING THE ONLINE EXHIBITION

Distribute the [KWL chart](#). Instruct students to fill out the first two columns, “What do you know?” and “What would you like to know?” After filling out the first two columns, students independently explore **Chapter I: Belonging** to establish a foundational understanding of the active role of the Rohingya in Burmese society. Students should read all the main text and scroll through the image carousels.

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Provide students about 10 minutes to complete their independent study. Once students have finished **Chapter I: Belonging**, they should fill out the last column in the KWL chart, “What did you learn?” Then, bring the class together to discuss students’ responses to the KWL chart:

- What do you know about this topic?
- What would you like to know about this topic?
- What did you learn about this topic?

15 min. DISCUSSION

Start a class discussion about the following Key Questions:

- What does it mean to “belong”? What evidence proves Rohingya belong in Burma?
- Why is it important to include the testimony of U Nu, the Prime Minister of Burma, alongside the voices of the Rohingya? How does his statement impact your understanding?
- Why does Nur, a Rohingya man, state “My documents and all of these documents of my forefathers are the most important things I have.”?
- In the decade after Burmese independence, how were the Rohingya recognized and included in Burmese society?

NOTES

- 1 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (see <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/what-is-a-refugee.htm>).
- 2 Sociologist Louis Wirth (1945)
- 3 The Refugee Convention, Article 33 (1951) (see <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/1951-refugee-convention.htm>).
- 4 Scott Straus, *Fundamentals of Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention* (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016), 57; (see <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/reports-and-resources/fundamentals-of-genocide-and-mass-atrocity-prevention>).
- 5 *Oxford Dictionary*
- 6 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Article II (1948) (for additional information, see <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/learn-about-genocide-and-other-mass-atrocities/what-is-genocide>).

60 min. CHAPTER II: TARGETED

KEY QUESTION

- How and why did the Burmese government slowly and deliberately redefine citizenship to exclude the Rohingya?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOME

- The genocide did not happen overnight—over many years the Burmese government enacted racist policies and laws that deliberately stripped Rohingya of their citizenship, other human rights, and place in society in order to create a nation that protected the Buddhist Bamar, the ethnic majority.



45 min. TIMELINE ACTIVITY

Enter **Chapter II: Targeted** in the online exhibition.

Read, or select student volunteers to read, the first two paragraphs of **Chapter II: Targeted**, beginning with “In its first years ...” and ending with “... minority communities.” Review the definitions for **CITIZENS**, **ETHNIC NATIONALISM**, **ETHNICITY**, and **MINORITY GROUP** from the introduction as needed.

Distribute the [Timeline Activity](#) to each student. Students will use the timeline to identify laws and regulations that persecuted Rohingya citizens from 1948 to today.

- As a class, use the information presented in **Chapter I: Belonging** to label the three Key Dates already listed on the timeline (1948, 1962, 2017).
- Key Dates:
 - 1948: Burma gained independence from Great Britain
 - 1962: Military seized power in Burma
 - 2017: Violent military-led attacks against Rohingya

Then, students work independently or as pairs to add at least eight additional entries to their timeline based on the information presented in **Chapter II: Targeted**. Students should read the text, scroll through the image carousels, and watch the short video titled “Gradual Erasure.” All timeline entries should include the date and a brief description.

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After approximately 15 minutes, gather students together to share the laws and regulations they identified in this chapter. You may choose to record student responses by creating a timeline on the board in your classroom or sharing your screen as you fill in a class copy of the Timeline Activity.

Potential Timeline Entries

- 1970s–1980s: The government confiscates Rohingya ID cards.
- 1982: The government passes a new citizenship law basing citizenship on ethnicity.
- 1984: The government no longer recognizes Rohingya as a race.
- 1989: Rohingya do not receive new government ID cards.
- 1991: Military launches violent campaign against the Rohingya.
- 1995: Rohingya receive temporary ID cards that do not prove Burmese citizenship.
- 1996: The government labels Rohingya as Bengali on registration lists.
- 2000s: The government requires Rohingya to stand for household registration photos.
- 2012: Local citizens attack Rohingya; security forces also participate.
- 2012: Rohingya children are barred from regular government-run schools.
- 2015: The government invalidates all temporary ID cards.
- 2015: Rohingya must identify as foreigners to request new National Verification Cards.

Discuss the class copy of the Timeline Activity. Looking at the final timeline, ask students what they observe about the anti-Rohingya policies and regulations enacted by the Burmese government. What policy or event surprised them most? What do they notice about the timing of these events? Were the events clustered together or spread out over many years?



15 min. DISCUSSION

Once the class timeline is complete, start a class discussion about the following key questions:

- How were the daily lives of the Rohingya impacted by these policies and regulations?
- How do these policies and restrictions create conditions in which violent attacks, such as those committed against the Rohingya in 2012, may occur?
- What does Nur, a Rohingya man, mean when he says, “That’s like you are destroying the roots of the tree [under the ground]. That’s the actual genocide.”?
- How and why did the Burmese government slowly and deliberately redefine citizenship to exclude the Rohingya?

60 min. CHAPTER III: WEAKENED

KEY QUESTION

- What does the proliferation of anti-Rohingya hate speech in the 2010s reveal about the social and cultural environment in Burma?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOME

- Burmese media—including social media—had a large role in dehumanizing the Rohingya and creating an atmosphere permissible for violence.



15 min. DEFINING KEY TERMS

Enter **Chapter III: Weakened** in the online exhibition.

Read, or select student volunteers to read, the first three paragraphs of **Chapter III: Weakened**, beginning with “While the military-run government ...” and ending with “... and it did.” Review the definition for **MINORITY GROUP** from the introduction as needed.

This section introduces a new vocabulary word: **HATE SPEECH**. First, create a class definition for hate speech based upon student understanding and input. Write the class definition on the board or on a shared screen.

Then, compare the class definition to the definition below. Ask the students whether the class definition mirrored the provided definition. If not, what do we need to add to the class definition in order to fully understand this concept?

- **HATE SPEECH**: any kind of communication in speech, writing, or behavior that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, descent, gender, or other identity factor.

Tell students that hate speech ignores, misconstrues, or distorts facts in order to justify beliefs or opinions. Ask students the differences between facts, beliefs, and opinions. Write responses on the board or on a shared screen. Then, provide the definitions below:

- **A FACT is verifiable**. We can determine whether it is true by researching the evidence.
- **An OPINION is a judgment based on facts**, an honest attempt to draw a reasonable conclusion from factual evidence.
- Unlike an opinion, a **BELIEF is a conviction based on cultural or personal faith, morality, or values**.

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30 min. HATE SPEECH ACTIVITY

The first step toward combating hate speech is identifying it.

Divide students into three groups. Each group is responsible for identifying and deconstructing one of the vicious and false claims made against the Rohingya as outlined in **Chapter III: Weakened**.

- Group 1: Rohingya are foreigners
- Group 2: Rohingya are less than human
- Group 3: Rohingya are a threat

Distribute the [Hate Speech Handout](#). Instruct groups to explore **Chapter III: Weakened** and answer the following questions about their assigned topic. Groups should watch the video “Spreading Hate” and read all the text in the photo carousels.

- Who has supported this claim?
- Where has this hate speech been published?
- Why might this belief appeal to the Burmese majority?
- What facts have been distorted?
- How does this rhetoric qualify as hate speech?

After approximately 15 minutes, bring the class back together to present on their findings. Each group will select one speaker to share what they learned. Use a Venn Diagram to record student responses for the class, or instruct students to use page 5 of the [Hate Speech Handout](#) to take notes individually.

After all three groups have shared, return to the Venn Diagram to analyze the commonalities among the three examples of hate speech used against the Rohingya.

- What individuals or groups supported multiple claims?
- Where did hate speech appear multiple times?
- What shared appeal might these beliefs have for the Burmese majority?
- What facts were repeatedly distorted?
- How do these examples qualify as hate speech?

15 min. DISCUSSION

Afterward, gather as a class to discuss the following key questions:

- How does social media play a role in the spread of anti-Rohingya hate speech?
- Do you think anti-Rohingya hate speech paves the way for physical violence? Why or why not?
- Bodru, a Rohingya man, stated “They are making us valueless.” What are the dangers of being perceived as “valueless”?
- What does the proliferation of anti-Rohingya hate speech in the 2010s reveal about the social and cultural environment in Burma?

60 min. CHAPTER IV: DESTROYED

KEY QUESTIONS

- Based on survivor testimony, how did the Burmese military carry out the genocide at Maung Nu?
- Why is it important to document and preserve evidence of the genocide of the Rohingya?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

- The Burmese military committed genocide against the Rohingya.
- Listening to survivors, collecting evidence, and bearing witness affirms the humanity and dignity of the Rohingya victims of genocide and establishes a historical record to combat denial.

45 min. DOCUMENTING THE EVIDENCE

Enter **Chapter IV: Destroyed** in the online exhibition.

Read, or select student volunteers to read, the first three paragraphs of **Chapter IV: Destroyed**, beginning with “The Burmese military ...” and ending with “... Rohingya who had lived there.” Review the definition for **GENOCIDE** from the introduction as needed.

Tell students that shortly after the August 2017 massacre at Maung Nu, photographer Greg Constantine interviewed and photographed the survivors. **This chapter includes graphic details of the massacre, as told through the testimony of the survivors, collection of evidence, and photographic documentation.**

Distribute the [Documenting the Evidence Handout](#). Students work in pairs to complete the handout using the information presented in **Chapter IV: Destroyed**. To provide additional context for the artifacts, instruct students to read the entire chapter before beginning their artifact analysis.

Assign each pair one of the following artifacts to analyze:

- Map of the village, Maung Nu
- List of those murdered written by Ayub
- Cell phone videos of the attacks

Provide students approximately 15 minutes to complete their artifact analysis using the photographs and videos from the online exhibition. Artifacts are also available for reference on pages 5–7 of the Documenting the Evidence handout.

Then, create small groups of six students/three pairs. Each pair should have studied a different artifact. Students share their artifact analysis in the small group.

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15 min. DISCUSSION

Gather as a class to discuss the following key questions.

- What artifact did you find the most compelling? Why?
- Ayub, a Rohingya man, stated, “They destroyed our religion by killing our religious scholars; our education by killing our teachers; and our economy by killing our businessmen and traders.” Why do you think community leaders are targets for violence?
- Based on survivor testimony, how did the Burmese military carry out the genocide at Maung Nu?
- Why is it important to document and preserve evidence of the genocide of the Rohingya?

60 min. CHAPTER V: SURVIVING

KEY QUESTION

- What are some of the long-term impacts for the Rohingya survivors of genocide?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

- Rohingya are still under threat of genocide today.
- Genocide has a lasting impact on individuals, communities, and nations, extending far beyond the atrocities committed.

45 min. PHOTO ANALYSIS

Unlike in previous chapters, complete the Photo Analysis activity before entering **Chapter V: Surviving**.

Create small groups of three to four students and distribute pages 1–4 of the [Photo Analysis Handout](#) to each student. Students should work as a group to fill out the handout, but each student should complete their own copy. Then, assign each group one of the seven photographs on pages 5–11 to analyze. Distribute one copy of the assigned photograph to each student.

Provide students 10 to 15 minutes to complete their photo analysis. Then, divide the students into new small groups of seven students. Each student should have studied a different photograph. Students share their photo analysis with the group. You may choose to have students share their full photo analysis, or present on the following questions:

- What do you think is happening in this photograph?
- How would you caption this photograph?
- What is one question that this photograph leaves you with?

Once students have presented in their small groups, bring the class together to reveal the captions of the photographs:

- **Photo 1:** Fearing for their lives, Rohingya left Burma with little notice. They brought the few possessions they could carry. Most lost everything. Families separated in the chaos. Women and children traveled without husbands, sons, and brothers—killed by the Burmese military. Those who survived tried to help elderly relatives make the trip. Once in Bangladesh, Rohingya had to make do with limited shelter and few supplies. In this photograph, Rohingya coming from Burma wait for small boats to take them to mainland Bangladesh.
- **Photo 2:** Family members carry an older Rohingya woman to their hut in the refugee camps in Bangladesh. Elderly women were some of the most vulnerable during the 2017 violence in Burma. For some it was impossible to walk the days or weeks it took to get from their destroyed villages to the border of Bangladesh.
- **Photo 3:** Rohingya scramble to find somewhere to settle and rest in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Many created makeshift tents and huts made from bamboo and plastic sheeting. This woman and her family spent five days walking through the jungle to reach Bangladesh after fleeing their village in Buthidaung.

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- **Photo 4:** Dilara, 22, and her children arrived in Bangladesh after the Burmese military destroyed her village in Maungdaw. Sick for more than ten days, she wrapped herself in a heavy blanket to battle the chills from a high fever. Rohingya like Dilara faced crowded living conditions and a lack of clean water, sanitation, and medical care in the refugee camps. Those conditions put them at risk for any number of diseases.
- **Photo 5:** Rohingya men wait in long lines to receive food rations at camps in Bangladesh. They are unable to work to provide food for their families.
- **Photo 6:** Abdul attempts to comfort his sick daughter, Noor. She contracted diphtheria because in Burma she, like many Rohingya, was denied basic healthcare, including life-saving vaccinations.
- **Photo 7:** Teenage boys pass the time in Kutupalong refugee camp. In Bangladesh, 97 percent of Rohingya youth ages 15 to 18 are denied any form of education in the refugee camps.

Considering all the photographs together, ask the students what do they think these photographs document?

To learn more about the Rohingya's ongoing struggle to survive, enter **Chapter V: Surviving** in the online exhibition.

Read, or select student volunteers to read, the first two paragraphs of **Chapter V: Surviving**, beginning with "During the violence in 2017 ..." and ending with "... Most long to return home." Review the definition for **REFUGEE** as needed.

Provide students 5 to 10 minutes to explore this chapter on their own. Instruct students to locate their photograph in the online exhibition and read the caption in full.

15 min. DISCUSSION

Then, gather as a class to discuss the following key questions:

- What have Rohingya refugees lost since fleeing Burma to neighboring Bangladesh?
- The exhibition states that most Rohingya "long to return home." What can this tell us about the Rohingya perspective?
- Mohammed, a Rohingya man, stated, "What they did with a pen actually murdered our lives! After attacking us with a pen and erasing our existence, then they physically attacked us.... The world didn't see how they have systematically destroyed us.... There has been no Justice for us.... What they have done to us is genocide." What do you think he means by this? What kind of "justice" might he seek?
- What are some of the long-term impacts for the Rohingya survivors of genocide?

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20 min. CONCLUSION

Use the enduring questions below to assess student understanding of the issues raised by the online exhibition *Burma's Path to Genocide*. You may choose to use all five enduring questions, or select those that mirror the chapters studied in your class.

Enduring questions may be used for a class discussion, or assigned as essay questions for students to answer independently. Students should use information presented in *Burma's Path to Genocide* to support their response.

ENDURING QUESTIONS

- What human rights should all people be guaranteed? Why?
- How does citizenship impact individual rights in a society?
- How can technology and media benefit a society? How can technology and media harm a society?
- What conditions make it possible for genocide to take place in a society?
- What can individuals do to confront hate, prevent genocide, and promote human dignity both at home and abroad?

ASSESSMENT

Option 1: Return to the definitions presented in **Chapter 1: Belonging**. As a class, discuss how *Burma's Path to Genocide* has impacted student understanding of these words. Ask students if the class definitions should be updated in any way in light of our new understanding? What questions do they still have about these terms? What additional information, if any, should we research in order to better understand these concepts?

Option 2: Students write an essay response applying the learnings from the USHMM *Holocaust Encyclopedia* article "[What have we learned about the risk factors and warning signs of genocide?](#)" to the online exhibition, *Burma's Path to Genocide*. What identifiable risk factors were present leading up to the genocide of the Rohingya? What risk factors were absent?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [USHMM Statement](#) on the Violence Against Burma's Rohingya Population (2017)
- [USHMM Statement](#) on Compelling Evidence Genocide was Committed Against the Rohingya (2018)
- Unitarian Universalist Service Committee [Discussion and Letter Writing Guide](#)