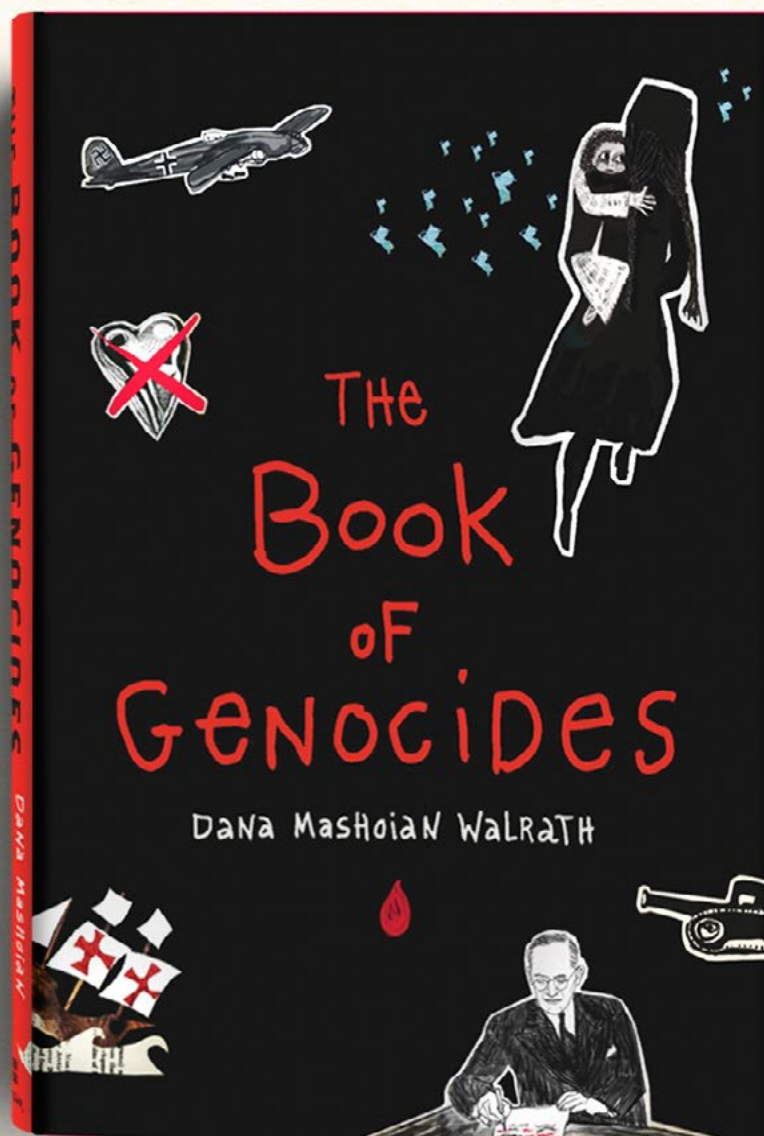


The Book of Genocides

DISCUSSION & ACTIVITY GUIDE



LEARN MORE

bookofgenocides.com



INFO FOR EDUCATORS & LIBRARIANS

The Book of Genocides has a Lexile level of 1270L (high school-level grade 9–10 or advanced middle school grade 7–8). For group and tax-exempt orders, please contact W. W. Norton (our distributor) at (800) 233-4830 or customerservice@wnnorton.com.

BOOK DETAILS: Paperback with flaps • 6.75 x 10" • 424 pages • COMICS • Color drawings throughout • ISBN: 9780674299054

About *The Book of Genocides*

THE BOOK

The Book of Genocides is a haunting graphic narrative that compels readers to confront the most harrowing chapters of human history not as distant events but as visceral experiences. Dana MASHOIAN WALRATH covers ten major atrocities across five centuries: the mass slaughter of the First Peoples of the Americas, the brutalization of Black Americans, the devastation of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders, the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, the Cambodian killing fields, the Rwandan genocide, the Bosnian genocide, the deadly persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar, and the genocide in Gaza.

Walrath makes plain that the purpose of genocide is always a land grab, and its central apparatus is dehumanization: each chapter delves into how dehumanization operates, not just through violence but through the political and intellectual systems that enable it. The book's unique interactive design allows readers to reshape images of victims into grotesque forms mirroring the mental mechanisms of dehumanization. With each page turn, the victims' humanity is restored, making their suffering undeniable.

The Book of Genocides is an unsettling experience, shot through with the emotional gravity of horrific events—not just historical memories but ongoing realities, painful truths that shape our world and demand our action.



Dana MASHOIAN WALRATH

A writer, artist, and anthropologist whose award-winning works include *Aliceheimer's*, a graphic memoir about her mother's dementia journey, and *Like Water on Stone*, a verse novel about the Armenian genocide. Her comics, art, essays, and poetry have been featured by *The Nation*, *The Lancet*, *Slate*, and NPR. Dana MASHOIAN WALRATH lives in Vermont.



PRAISE

"Audacious and personal...An experimental blend of anthropology, memoir, and visual art...In the tradition of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Joe Sacco's *Palestine*, *The Book of Genocides* uses the graphic form to bridge the gap between abstract history and raw empathy."

—David Smith, *The Guardian*

"An unflinching guide through the long sweep of humanity's most shameful episodes. This is how art answers back."

—Joe Sacco, author of *Palestine*

"A haunting read...recounts some of humanity's darkness moments."

—Oliver Sava, *A.V. Club*

"[A] powerful contribution. Full of heart, it has given us a rich lens for staring into our common abyss."

—Noah Fischer, *Hyperallergic*

"Her vision is deeply humane, and her message couldn't be timelier."

—Alison Bechdel, author of *Fun Home*

"Unflinching [and] artfully rendered...Deliver[s] grace and humanity to the victims of these cruelties. This brave, heartrending study commands attention."

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"Searing...[An] inspired and affecting pairing of images and prose."

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

"Brilliant...[A] remarkable literary accomplishment."

—*Booklist* (starred review)

Discussion Questions

1. What can a graphic narrative make visible that a conventional historical account might leave abstract or distant?
2. How does Walrath use the visual language of comics to make catastrophe imaginable, visible, or emotionally accessible?
3. How does the book balance historical information with personal, emotional, and artistic interpretation?
4. Did the graphic form make these histories more accessible, more difficult, or both? What made you feel that way?
5. The book examines the conditions that make genocide possible. What recurring systems and processes do you see across the chapters?
6. How does the book challenge the idea that genocide begins suddenly, with a single event, leader, or declaration?
7. Each turn-the-flap interactive zine can be transformed through cutting and recombination. What does this physical act add to your understanding of dehumanization? Was it difficult to cut the pages? Why or why not?
8. How do the redacted texts function? What do they conceal, expose, or force readers to reconstruct?
9. How does Walrath's background—as an Armenian American, artist, anthropologist, and descendant of genocide survivors—shape the book?
10. What becomes possible when these histories are read together? What important differences must still be preserved?
11. How does the book resist what the author calls an “Oppression Olympics”—the tendency to compare suffering by numbers or rank?
12. Which images, symbols, or formal choices stayed with you? What made them memorable or unsettling?
13. What is the relationship between remembering, seeking justice, and resisting violence?
14. What role or responsibilities do museums, schools, publishers, artists, governments, and readers have in preserving difficult histories?
15. Which chapter most changed or complicated your understanding of genocide? Why?
16. What dehumanizing language or imagery do you recognize in contemporary public life? What effects can that language have?
17. What makes people more likely to accept exclusion, discrimination, or violence against others? What can make resistance more likely?
18. When systems are larger than any one person, what can individuals do—and what can communities, organizations, and institutions do—to challenge violence and support human rights?

KEEP READING

DISASTER DRAWN

Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form

By Hilary L Chute

BLOOD AND SOIL

A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur

By Ben Kiernan

ON TYRANNY

By Timothy Snyder; illustrated by Nora Krug

TOTALLY UNOFFICIAL

The Autobiography of Raphael Lemkin

Edited by Donna-Lee Frieze

THE MESSAGE

By Ta-Nehisi Coates

EVERYTHING YOU KNOW

ABOUT INDIANS IS WRONG

By Paul Chaat Smith

NATIVE NATIONS

A Millennium in North America

By Kathleen DuVal

THE REDISCOVERY OF AMERICA

Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History

By Ned Blackhawk

MARCH

By John Lewis and Andrew Aydin; illustrated by Nate Powell

CASTE

The Origins of Our Discontents

By Isabel Wilkerson

STONY THE ROAD

Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow

By Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

FROM HERE TO EQUALITY

Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century

By William A. Darity Jr. and Andrea Kirsten Mullen

Activities

Beyond the Oppression Olympics

Use comparison to identify patterns across the histories in *The Book of Genocides* without ranking suffering or treating distinct communities as interchangeable.

Choose two or more chapters or historical cases. Working individually, in pairs, or in small groups, examine each case using the questions from the Introduction:

1. Who was targeted? Who carried out, enabled, or benefited from the violence?
2. What stories, beliefs, laws, or ideologies were used to justify it?
3. How was the violence organized or institutionalized?
4. What forms of resistance, solidarity, survival, or recovery appear?
5. How did governments, institutions, communities, and outsiders respond?
6. What has been remembered, forgotten, denied, distorted, or contested?

Record your observations in a chart. Do not assign scores or decide which case was “worst.” Discuss:

7. What patterns became clearer when you looked at the cases together?
8. What important differences emerged?
9. What does comparison help us understand about how violence develops?
10. What might comparison flatten, obscure, or accidentally equate?
11. How can we compare these histories while preserving each community’s specificity, humanity, and historical context?
12. What lessons can communities and institutions draw from these histories without treating them as identical?

What Remains: Blackout Poems and Historical Memory

Examine how language can conceal, justify, normalize, or challenge violence. Create a blackout poem from a short excerpt from a historical document, official report, newspaper article, legal text, speech, textbook, memorial statement, or other published text.

1. Obscure most of the text while leaving selected words visible. Make deliberate choices about which words to preserve, connect, or emphasize. Allow the remaining words to become a poem, statement, question, or fragmented narrative.
4. Compare the poem with the original excerpt. What changed?
5. Discuss what the activity reveals about language, memory, omission, and responsibility.

The Making of the “Other”

Using the turn-the-flap sections of *The Book of Genocides*, invite participants to explore how cutting, folding, layering, and rearranging can represent the processes of dehumanization.

1. Distribute the materials and invite participants to cut, fold, layer, obscure, or rearrange them into new figures, sequences, or compositions.
2. After making or observing a transformation, return to the accompanying chapter and discuss how the physical activity changes the experience of reading it.

KEEP READING, CONT.

DARK EMU

Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture

By Bruce Pascoe

TELL IT TO THE WORLD

An Indigenous Memoir

By Stan Grant

A SHAMEFUL ACT

The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility

By Taner Akcam

THE BURNING TIGRIS

The Armenian Genocide and America’s Response

By Peter Balakian

REMNANTS

Embodied Archives of the Armenian Genocide

By Elyse Semerdjian

ALL THE FREQUENT TROUBLES OF OUR DAYS

The True Story of the American Woman at the Heart of the German Resistance to Hitler

By Rebecca Donner

MAUS

By Art Spiegelman

LETTING IT GO

By Miriam Katin

THE HUNDRED YEARS’ WAR ON PALESTINE

A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017

By Rashid Khalidi

ONE DAY, EVERYONE WILL HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AGAINST THIS

By Omar El Akkad

THE ETHNIC CLEANSING OF PALESTINE

By Ilan Pappé

PALESTINE

By Joe Sacco

The Making of the “Other” (continued)

3. Reflect on how dehumanization happens. Consider the roles of language, imagery, ideology, institutions, and individual behavior. What forms can dehumanization take, and how do those forms reinforce one another?
4. What did this activity reveal about how people learn what is considered acceptable, and how can we learn to question those assumptions?
5. Discuss what can we do—in our everyday lives and within our institutions—to question and challenge assumptions that contribute to dehumanization?

What Can Art Do?

Ask participants to consider what *The Book of Genocides* makes possible through its comic form. Explore how visual art can shape historical understanding, emotional response, memory, and responsibility.

Begin with a discussion:

1. What can a comic represent that a textbook, documentary, or historical essay might not?
2. How do images, text, humor, interactivity, and physical materials shape our response?
3. What can art make visible, and what might it leave unclear?
4. When can metaphor or abstraction help us approach difficult history?

Invite participants to create a work inspired by a feature of *The Book of Genocides*—such as panels, repetition, collage, turn-the-flap pages, visual metaphor, or fragmentation—that they found meaningful or challenging:

1. **Memory collage:** Combine words, images, colors, or textures to explore what is remembered, forgotten, or contested.
2. **Memorial design:** Create a physical, written, sketched, or digital memorial for one of the historical events or themes in the book. Consider who is named, who is absent, what visitors are asked to do, and what the memorial cannot represent or restore.
3. **Original comic page:** Create a one-page comic using at least three techniques, such as panels, captions, repetition, layering, visual metaphor, hidden elements, or contrasting text and image. Explore a theme such as memory, silence, complicity, resistance, or the difficulty of representing violence.

Ask participants to write a brief artist's statement:

1. What theme or question does your artwork explore?
2. Which artistic choices did you make, and why?
3. What did you show, conceal, fragment, or leave unresolved?
4. How was your work influenced by *The Book of Genocides*?
5. What do you want viewers to notice or consider?
6. What are the limits of your artwork?

Display the works or invite participants to present them briefly

KEEP READING, CONT.

YEAR OF THE RABBIT

By Tian Veasna

FIRST THEY KILLED MY FATHER

A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers

By Loung Ung

LANDBRIDGE

[Life in Fragments]

By Y-Dang Troeung

MACHETE SEASON

The Killers in Rwanda Speak

By Jean Hatzfeld

WE WISH TO INFORM YOU THAT TOMORROW WE WILL BE KILLED WITH OUR FAMILIES

By Philip Gourevitch

SHAKE HANDS WITH THE DEVIL

The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda

By Roméo Dallaire

SAFE AREA GORAŽDE

The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-1995

By Joe Sacco; introduction by
Christopher Hitchens

POSTCARDS FROM THE GRAVE

By Emir Suljagić

GENOCIDE ON THE DRINA RIVER

By Edina Becirevic

FIRST, THEY ERASED OUR NAME

A Rohingya Speaks

By Habiburahman and Sophie Ansel

THE ROHINGYAS

Inside Myanmar's Genocide

By Azeem Ibrahim

MYANMAR'S ENEMY WITHIN

*Buddhist Violence and the Making
of a Muslim 'Other'*

By Francis Wade