

Whole School Assembly

Srebrenica Genocide

This document provides a whole school assembly plan suitable to commemorate the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide during Srebrenica Memorial Week 2014. The assembly should provide learning opportunities, as well as honouring the victims and survivors. The assembly would also be suitable for use with smaller groups, such as year groups, form or tutor groups.



It is highly recommended that before presenting this assembly you take the time to read through the text and view the accompanying PowerPoint presentation. The assembly should be tailored towards the needs of the pupils within your school, where appropriate, and may also be used as part of a wider remembrance programme. For example, where Remembering Srebrenica delegates or survivors of the Srebrenica genocide have been invited to speak.

At the end of this document there are suggestions for further reading and resources if either you or your students would like to know more.

For this presentation you will need:

- Equipment to display the PowerPoint presentation
- To know how many boys will be in the room and how many boys make up 40% of the total

Slide one

Front Cover

Slide Two

In 2009, the European Union made the 11 July Srebrenica Memorial Day.¹ This day of commemoration was introduced to honour the victims and survivors of the genocide at Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Eastern Europe, in 1995. This is viewed as the worst atrocity in Europe since the Second World War.

On Srebrenica Memorial Day we remember those who were killed and those relatives who were left behind. As with Holocaust Memorial Day in January, Srebrenica Memorial Day gives us the opportunity to challenge ourselves to consider lessons from the past and what we can all do to create a better, more tolerant society in the future.

In today's assembly we will learn what happened at Srebrenica, why it happened, and how important it is to prevent prejudice before it turns into hatred and violence.

Slide Three

Before we discuss Srebrenica it is important to make sure that we all understand what we mean when we use the word 'genocide'.

The crime of genocide is defined in international law as an act 'committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group'.

Genocide is generally carried out through the attempted killing of all members of a group, but can also be classified as deliberately 'placing a group in conditions calculated to prevent their survival' (such as concentration camps).

At Srebrenica, men were systematically separated from women and children before being killed, indicating that their death was planned and organised. People who commit these crimes sometimes try to explain them away by saying that they were committed by a few bad individuals, but imagine how many individuals it takes to organise the execution and burial of 8,372 people.

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So now that we understand what genocide means, we can explain what happened at Srebrenica in July 1995.

Srebrenica is a small town in eastern Bosnia. As you can see from the map Bosnia sits in-between Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro in South-East Europe. Bosnia used to be part of the country known as Yugoslavia. It has a mixed population of Catholic Christians, Eastern Orthodox Christians and Muslims. These religions also link to other identities. Catholic Christians tend to be Bosnian Croat. Orthodox Christians tend to be Bosnian Serb, while Bosnian Muslims are known as Bosniaks.

¹ For assistance with pronunciation, Srebrenica is generally pronounced: Sreb- ren- nitza.

These communities have lived alongside each other for hundreds of years. For a long time from the Second World War until the 1990s they lived together in relative peace, and communities often seemed integrated.

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Following the death of the Communist leader of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito, in 1980, tensions between the different groups began to grow, leading to the formation of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia as we know them today. The conflicts continued, despite the birth of these nations. As a result of the mixed Croat, Serb and Bosnian population within Bosnia, violence turned to a war that lasted from 1992-1995.

There was violence across the country, and the capital, Sarajevo, endured the longest-ever military siege, 1,425 days or nearly four years. So children who started school in year 7, would have been almost finished with year 10 by the time the siege was lifted and they could walk safely through the streets again.

In the east, the Bosnian Serb army besieged the town of Srebrenica. The people inside the town were mostly Bosnian Muslims.

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In 1993, the United Nations declared Srebrenica a safe zone, but in July 1995 Bosnian Serb forces attacked the town. The Dutch UN troops, there to protect the town but small in number, failed to stop the Bosnian Serb forces.

Slide Seven

(Power Point video- Hasan Hasanović- 1.06)

Listen to the brief account of Hasan Hasanović, now curator of the Srebrenica/Potocari memorial.

Inside the town there was chaos. Some people retreated to a battery factory at a place called Potočari² where the Dutch soldiers were based.

Up to 15,000 men and boys who did not believe that the Dutch would protect them chose instead to try to walk through the hills to reach another safe zone with what remained of the Bosnian Muslim forces. The vast majority were unarmed.

Serb forces entered Srebrenica and General Ratko Mladic was filmed declaring, 'We give this town to the Serb nation....The time has come to take revenge on the Muslims.'" Mladic's speech underlines that Bosnian Serb aims were to ethnically cleanse the area of Bosnian Muslims.

At the Dutch base and with cooperation from the UN troops, Bosnian Serb forces separated men and older boys from women and children, pretending that the men would be taken to a safe area to be exchanged. In fact they were driven to fields and large buildings nearby and killed.

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² To assist with pronunciation Potočari is generally pronounced: Pot-o-chari.

The men and boys who had left to walk through the hills also suffered. Bosnian Serb forces entered the hills and attacked the unarmed men and boys who were trying to escape. Many were captured and then taken to nearby locations and executed. In total, Bosnian Serb forces are believed to have killed 8,372 men and boys in and around Srebrenica. The journey of those who tried to escape through the hills became known as the 'The Column' or 'Death March'.

Possible activities:

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1:

Use the quote (or part of the quote) below to start two minutes of reflection for the pupils:

Hasan Hasanovic quote on being part of the The Column/Death March. Hasan walked for five days and nights to escape Srebrenica:

"I could think of nothing but pushing forward. Forward was freedom; forward was survival...I pushed forward with all my might, until finally from the sea of men ahead, I saw woodland. I realised at that moment that I had lost my family. Husein, my father, and my uncle. As much as I wanted to stop and look for them, I knew if I did, I would be killed. I told myself if I wanted to live, I would have to run and not look back.

Till this day, I cannot believe I was part of The Column. Everyday, I wonder where I got that strength...the experience has stayed with me since then. It follows me everyday; from the moment I get up, to the moment I go to sleep. I just can't get rid of it. The worst thing is the anguish that comes with thinking about Husein and my father — wondering how they were killed....That pain is almost unbearable.

I moved back to Srebrenica in 2009, when I started working for the Memorial Center as a curator and translator. Sometimes, it's painful being here, but it's my home. It's where I belong."

OR

Slide Ten

2:

Ask all of the boys in the hall to stand up. Ask both boys and girls to imagine that they may never see each other again. Now ask the boys to imagine that they are part of the 'The Column'. It's midnight and they are walking into the hills waiting to be attacked. The march lasted five days and nights with very little food or water and constant threat of attack or capture.

Now ask around 60% of the boys to sit down. It is difficult to be precise given the atrocity, but it is likely that only those left standing made it to safety.

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After they had committed their crimes Bosnian Serb forces worried that their acts of genocide would be discovered. So, they dug up the mass graves and reburied the people they had executed in hundreds of smaller sites to try to prevent the international community charging them with war crimes.

Through the work of organisations such as the Bosnia Missing Persons Institute and the International Commission on Missing Persons these efforts have been in vain. Many mass graves have been found and

people given back their identities and buried. For many more relatives and survivors the wait goes on, even twenty years later, to find evidence of their loved ones and to be able to bury their bodies.

Key individuals such as Ratko Mladic, and the former Bosnian Serb President, Radzan Karadzic, are now on trial in the international criminal court at The Hague for war crimes.

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The impact of the genocide continues to haunt Srebrenica, despite the capture of some individuals. The mothers and relatives of those who died continue to fight for justice. Every year hundreds more bodies are identified and buried. This is very traumatic for those affected. Srebrenica used to be predominantly Bosnian Muslim. Now it is 95% Bosnian Serb. Those who have returned to their homes have to live alongside people who may have committed crimes against them.

Slide Twelve

Today we have learnt about the genocide at Srebrenica in 1995 and its terrible impact. Bosnia was a country with a long history of communities living side-by-side and what happened there demonstrates that, if left unchecked, hatred and intolerance can grow and be unleashed to terrible effect.

We have done much in the UK to promote tolerance and combat racism, but we can still learn lessons from the events at Srebrenica. We can honour the victims by pledging ourselves to find ways to make society better and more inclusive for everyone. We can mark Srebrenica Memorial Day on 11 July, as well as Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January, to remind us to do what we can to make sure that these crimes never take place again.

By being in this assembly you have already made a contribution by remembering Srebrenica and commemorating the victims of genocide.

What else can you pledge to do to make sure that we keep our own society safe from hatred and intolerance?

You could pledge to:

- Find out more about Srebrenica
- Share the story of Srebrenica with friends and family
- Write a story, poem or blog about Srebrenica
- Do something in your own community to bring people together