

# Disinformation and Genocide

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## Keywords

genocide, history manipulation, history falsification, propaganda, anti-Semitism, racism

## Introduction for the teacher

This lesson scenario is intended for older students (aged 16 and above). The subject matter discussed allows for its use in interdisciplinary classes in such subjects as history, culture, native language, media education as well as social sciences.

The material has been divided into three parts: the lesson scenario, a set of source materials and a worksheet with exercises to be done in class, in a group or individually. Elements of the scenario can be modified to suit the target audience.

## Instructions

The script contains four pieces of source material and a worksheet with exercises. They are intended particularly for group work using techniques to engage students, yet individual learners can perform the tasks on their own too. The suggested lesson structure can be modified, along with the sources and exercises. Internet access would be useful during the lessons as well as allowing the students to use telecommunication devices with internet access (smartphones, tablets, etc.).

## Goals

The student is able to:

- indicate the reasons for the development of attitudes of intolerance towards national minorities in society,
- perceive the impact of historical fallacies and any disinformation in relation to hate speech, persecution and genocide,
- describe examples of human rights violations in the 20th century,
- analyse source texts and photographs pointing out cause-and-effect links.

### **Teaching methods**

- teaching discussion,
- group work,
- brainstorm,
- analysis of source material,
- case study,
- Socratic method of debate,
- mind mapping,
- work with a set of exercises.

### **Teaching aids**

- board/flipcharts, marker pen/chalk,
- large paper sheets/Bristol board sheets,
- a computer with internet access and a projector/multimedia board.

### **Before the lesson**

Ask the students to read the essay entitled '[Examples of Great Falsifications in 20thcentury History](#)'.

Before the lesson itself, it is worthwhile watching the film *Hotel Ruanda* (dir. Terry George, 2004) together with the students. If screening it at school is not possible (due to copyright regulations limiting the use of film material during lessons), the students may be asked to watch it on their own before the lesson, focusing on the background of the Rwandan genocide.

## Lesson scenario

### Introduction

1. Explain to the students that the aim of this unit is to explore the tragic consequences of the mechanisms of history manipulation through selected examples.
2. Suggest a simple exercise – a game of Chinese whispers. Make up a simple sentence, give it to the first student on a piece of paper and ask them to repeat it quietly to the next person (it is important not to overhear or repeat the sentence). The last student should repeat the sentence. It is very likely that the sentence will not sound the same as the one written down at the start. This is similar to the circulation of information. Repeated many times, it often takes the form of a rumour, a piece of information that receives additional elements with each successive recipient. What if someone deliberately changes the information or uses it to create a false image? Cite an example from the history of the 19th century: the Ems Telegram edited by Bismarck, which was instrumental in unifying Germany (it was only one of the reasons).<sup>1</sup>
3. Disinformation and manipulation of history can lead to genocide or give impetus to the creation of ideologies that play a role in mass killings and murders because of origin, race and language.

### Development

1. Tell the students that in class they will explore three stories. Two of them are based on manipulation, misrepresentation and falsification, which together with other factors have led to genocide. However, their power of influence did not end after the crimes had been committed and continues to this day. Another, concerning the Armenians, is a perfect example of the denial of obvious historical facts, which are subject to constant manipulation despite the passage of over 100 years.
2. Divide the students into three teams. Each team should receive a set of worksheets and source material: Team 1 – Material A, Team 2 – B and Team 3 – C and D. Tell the

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<sup>1</sup> Recommended reading: [Ems Telegram](#) [accessed 24.11.2021].

students that their objective will be a case study, i.e. an attempt to answer the question: *why can manipulation be dangerous?* Define the rules of the task, indicating on the board/flipchart the basic questions needed to solve the exercises as a key to reflection: what happened? What were the causes of the event? What problem arose in connection with this event? Who benefits from disinformation leading to genocide? Your role during the group work could be to moderate the discussion and involve reluctant students.<sup>2</sup>

3. One of the best ways to summarise the conclusions of your work on a difficult topic is through a Socratic debate. Ask the students to sit in a circle (preferably on the floor).<sup>3</sup> It is worth asking them at the very beginning how they felt as they were reading the materials. Advise them that the most important thing in a debate is to think critically and to formulate questions in order to have an open and multifaceted discussion, so going astray and venturing into history's blind alleys is allowed. It is important that the discussants feel free to express their thoughts, even if they are emotionally charged.
4. During the discussion, you are the moderator, as well as acting as a guardian of the debate, making sure that it does not stray too far from the subject under discussion. During the exchange, the students use the conclusions and insights from the case study (the exercises they did on the worksheets are helpful here). The aim is not to reach a consensus, but to clarify issues and to develop (even) a few reasoned points. During the discussion, the moderator writes the emerging conclusions on the board/flipchart.

The discussion topic is the same as the case studies. Your students will have the opportunity to share their findings, which they have previously developed in groups: why can disinformation/manipulation of history be dangerous?

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<sup>2</sup> Elaborated on the basis of: Elżbieta Królikowska, 'Najlepiej widać na przykładzie, czyli studium przypadku jako metoda nauczania' [Best seen by example, or the case study as a teaching method] [accessed 7.12.2020]. Available from KOSS: <https://koss.ceo.org.pl/dla-nauczycieli/uczyc-inaczey/artykuly/najlepiej-widac-na-przykladzie-czyli-studium-przypadkujako>.

<sup>3</sup> During lessons conducted online, it will be sufficient to make sure an appropriate order is maintained for the students taking the floor, e.g. using tools that indicate their willingness to speak.

## **Summary**

At the end of the discussion, ask the students to write down the most important points that have emerged from the exchange of ideas and opinions. This will form the basis of an essay for homework.

## **Homework**

'Sometimes lies, especially the worst ones, are like flares shot into the darkness. They warn of impending disaster' (Deb Caletti).

Is Deb Caletti right? Formulate your answer; do not forget to justify it, possibly using the material used in class and your own knowledge.

## Answers

The lesson scenario and the worksheet have been developed to allow students to have considerable independence in narrative creation. As the teacher's role is that of a supervisor and moderator, below you will find only answers to questions requiring simple content analysis (Exercises 1, 4, 5 and 7). The rest remains in the hands of your students and your own, Dear Colleague.

### Exercise 1

Possible answers:

Media bashing, pejorative labels, racism, history manipulation by Belgians and the Hutu.

### Exercise 4

The definition may be based on the provisions of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide

Article II

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.<sup>1</sup>

### Exercise 5

- Suspicion of a threat from Russia;
- Armenians possibly acting as the 'fifth column' in case of a war with Russia;
- Armenians wishing to create their own state at the expense of Turkey;
- Nationalism/chauvinism – wishing to remove the Armenian community; motivated by the ideas championed by the Young Turks.

### Exercise 7

*Fake news* – definition: false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1948 (ratified pursuant to Act of 18 July 1950) [accessed 24.11.2021]. Available from the UN Treaty Collection: [https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1951/01/19510112%2008-12%20PM/Ch\\_IV\\_1p.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1951/01/19510112%2008-12%20PM/Ch_IV_1p.pdf). <sup>2</sup> The definition of the term *fake news* [accessed 24.11.2021]. Available from the Cambridge Dictionary: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fake-news>.