

## Syrian-Armenian Archive: Individual Research Exploration

**Note to Teachers:** This is an assignment outline for students in a social studies, history, or research class who are interested in getting exposure to introductory archival use and research. The assignment should ideally be a long-weekend or a vacation assignment, in order to give students adequate time to explore the archive and answer their chosen question thoughtfully, but the length of the written response assignment can be adjusted to fit your class's curriculum needs.

This assignment might be a good addition to your pre-established lessons or curriculum covering any of the following:

- Research Methods
- Primary and Secondary Sources
- Archives
- Social Awareness and Refugees
- Contemporary Middle Eastern studies
- Ottoman Empire History

*Content warning: Please note that this archive contains personal descriptions of violence and disturbing events in the context of genocide, displacement, and conflict.*

**Primary Objective:** Students will practice learning from an archive in order to write their own essays in response to introductory research questions.

Additional objectives:

*Students will be able to:*

- Explain a bit about Armenians and the Syrian Armenian experience

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## Introduction of Assignment

(In Class, approximately ten minutes)

*To introduce the assignment, introduce the following information:*

*Ask:* Does anyone know about Armenia, or Armenian people?

*Look for answers that cover the following, or give the following information as an answer:*

- Armenians are a group of people, just like Ghanaian people, German people, or Korean people, for example. They are a group of people connected by shared history, ethnicity, and in most cases, religion and aspects of culture.
- Over 100 years ago, they were the victims of a Genocide (like the Holocaust, the Rwandan Genocide, the Cambodian Genocide), which meant that most survivors left their homes and spread all over the world.

- Today, lots of Armenians live in countries like in Russia, France, and Lebanon. There is a large population of Armenians living in the Republic of Armenia in the Caucasus region, just east of Turkey, north of Iran, south of Georgia, and west of Azerbaijan. There are Armenian communities all over the US, including Armenian communities in cities like LA, Boston, and Philadelphia.
- The Republic of Armenia declared itself an independent country in 1991. Before 1991, Armenia was the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic as a part of the USSR for about 70 years. The Republic of Armenia's official language is "Armenian", however the Armenian spoken in the Republic is actually *Eastern* Armenian, one of the two Armenian language dialects, Eastern and Western Armenian. Western Armenian is primarily spoken by the diaspora outside of the Republic.
- There was a sizable Armenian community in Syria, mostly centered in Aleppo. Armenians in Syria live as ethnic and religious minorities, but after living there for +100 years, they've become a part of the larger community and generally appeared comfortable and content. When the Syrian war reached Aleppo in 2012 and as things got worse in the area, many Syrian Armenians (Armenians with Syrian passports or who grew up in or have other strong connections to Syria) had to leave their homes behind them.

## Home Assignment

*Instructions:* Begin to explore the archive at [rerooted.org](http://rerooted.org) and look through the questions listed below. After exploring around in the archive a bit (maybe you read some transcripts, watch parts of some of the interview videos, or listen to recordings), select one of the questions listed below. Write a two-page response using information you gather from the archive, additional research, and your interpretations.

### *Research Questions:*

1. Who are the Syrian Armenians? Do they see themselves as Armenians, Syrians, both, neither? Based on information you gather from the archive, what is a Syrian-Armenian identity?
2. Investigate the archive for conversations about homeland and home. Do these conversations usually refer to a physical space or more of an idea? Discuss.
3. What is a "homeland"? Write your answer referencing interviews from the archive for support.
4. How does a genocide influence the experience of people generations after that genocide experience?
5. What was the Armenian experience like in 1915, during the Armenian Genocide? How did Armenians live and what conditions were they facing?
6. What were Armenian relations like with other Syrian nationals during the time leading up to the Syrian War?
7. How do individuals experience the same traumatic period differently?
8. What happened in Aleppo during the ongoing Syrian conflict? Why might getting information about this conflict from only one group involved (in this case, Syrian Armenians) influence your understanding of the situation?