

Amplifying Culture Through Art

Activity Overview

In this activity, students will explore what it means to be resilient and evaluate how art can build resilience in survivors and descendants of traumatic events. This activity invites students to think about the meaning of resilience by reflecting on personal examples and defining its significance as a trait.

After developing a clear understanding of resilience, students will begin to examine the relationship between art and resilience by analyzing the story of Arpi Krikorian, an Armenian-American artist who creates illustrations that celebrate the joy, color, and beauty of Armenian culture.

Next, students will apply their understanding of the relationship between art and resilience as they engage with testimonies from Armenian Genocide survivors and descendants. These testimonies encourage students to think more critically about the impacts that making, performing, and displaying art can have on survivors of traumatic events and others who encounter their art.

Educator Note: *Students should watch Arpi Krikorian's video before this activity begins. Students should also be introduced to the term "resilience" and have a working understanding of its meaning prior to this activity. For background on the Armenian Genocide, use the "The Armenian Genocide, 1915-1923" handout at the end of this activity.*

Target Audience

Grades 3-5

Activity Duration

Two 45-60 minute sessions

Enduring Understandings

- The act of making, displaying, and/or performing art can make survivors and descendants of a traumatic event more resilient.
- Art can build resilience by celebrating the culture, identity, and survival of the survivors and/or descendants of a traumatic event.



Materials

- *Educator Background: The Armenian Genocide, 1915–1923*
- *Handout: See-Wonder-Connect*
- *Handout: Testimony as a Primary Source (2 per student)*
- *Handout: Artistic Expression Brainstorming*

Essential Questions

- What does it mean to be resilient?
- Why is resilience an important trait, especially for survivors or descendants of a traumatic event?
- What role do the arts play in helping build resilience?

Procedure

Ask

- Begin class by explaining to students that today they will be thinking about the connection between art and resilience. Review the concept of “resilience” with the class. Remind students that resilience means the ability to recover quickly after going through challenges. Display the term and definition so it is visible to all students.
- Present the class with the question, “What might resilience look like?” and allow students to share their responses aloud. Use chart paper or a whiteboard to capture key words or ideas as students share. Students may list examples, come up with adjectives, make connections, or think of images they associate with the concept of resilience.
- Invite students to think about the concept of resilience by holding a class discussion. To help explore the theme and definition above, ask students to consider the following questions during this discussion:
 - How are our understandings of resilience similar and how are they different?
 - Why is resilience an important trait?
 - How might people become more resilient?
- As the discussion concludes, emphasize to students that one reason resilience is important is because it can help people recover after a traumatic event and one way people can build resilience is by creating works of art.

Analyze

- Next, students will analyze the relationship between art and resilience by examining the story of Arpi Krikorian.

Educator Note: *it is recommended that students be provided with historical background regarding the Armenian Genocide prior to this segment of the activity.*

- Distribute a copy of the **See-Wonder-Connect Handout** to each student.
- Watch the Arpi Krikorian video as a class. Encourage students to listen actively, paying particular attention to how Arpi shows resilience through her art.
- As the video plays, direct students to record observations from the video that are meaningful to them in the “See” column of their handout.
- After watching the video once, play it again for the class. Prompt students to think about questions they have and connections they can make about Arpi’s story. Direct students to record these in the “Wonder” and “Connect” columns of their handout. Divide students into small groups of 4–6 and invite them to discuss their selections, explaining the observations, questions, and connections they noted on their handout. The discussions should be structured in rounds, with one student sharing their reflections in the “See” column inviting others to comment and discuss.
- Groups will continue this process until they have discussed each member’s “See,” “Wonder,” and “Connect” columns.
- Invite students to reflect on their conversation within their groups by identifying the message behind Arpi Krikorian’s art and its importance given her heritage and the history of the Armenian people.

Educator Note: *if younger students require additional support, this exercise may also be done as a whole class in the form of a teacher-led discussion. As students reflect, encourage them to consider how Arpi emphasizes the importance of creating Armenian art that makes people smile, and how this speaks to the power of art to build resilience by celebrating culture and showcasing joy in the wake of traumatic events.*

- Direct students to complete the **See-Connect-Wonder Handout** by reflecting on their understanding of the relationship between art and resilience. Students may fill in the organizer at the bottom of the page using words or pictures to express this connection.

Apply

- Next, students will apply their understanding of the connection between art and resilience as they analyze testimonies from survivors and descendants of the Armenian Genocide.
- Distribute two copies of the modified **Testimony as a Primary Source Analysis Handout** to each student.
 - The **Testimony as a Primary Source Analysis Handout** is modified to help students consider the importance of art as a tool for building resilience in survivors and descendants of traumatic events.
- When viewing testimony, help strengthen the experience by:
 - sharing important biographical information for both speakers using information located at the end of the lesson. You can also share the map included with the biographies to help ground students understanding of location and build context.

- pausing clips to allow time for students to reflect, record thoughts, questions, and ideas.
- encouraging students to find connections to their own lives, personal experiences, or events taking place today.

■ Testimonies for Analysis:

- [Jirayr Zorthian](#) (2:19)—Jirayr describes memories of Armenian culture, including gatherings with singing and dancing, before the Armenian genocide.
- [Alyce Vanley](#) (2:43)—Alyce and her daughter, Pat, discuss how their Armenian identity and culture are reflected in their art.

■ After completing testimony analysis, allow students to discuss their reflections from the **Testimony as a Primary Source Analysis Handout** and share key ideas that stuck with them from the testimonies. The following questions may be used to prompt students to think more deeply about the connection between art and resilience:

- How can songs, dances, and paintings help people feel better after a difficult experience?
- Why is it important for people to celebrate their culture?
- What connections can we make between these testimonies and Arpi Krikorian's story?
- What can these stories tell us about art and resilience?

Act

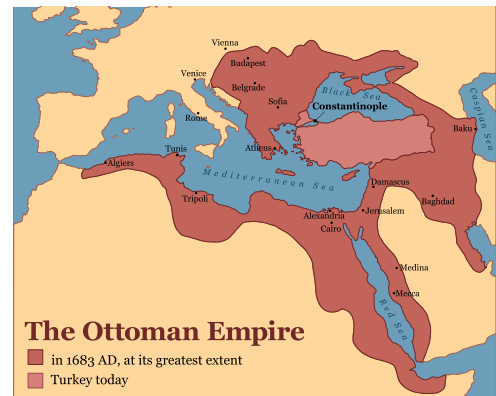
- Finally, students will take action by creating an artistic expression that communicates how art is meaningful to them based on their own experiences.
- Using the **Artistic Expression Brainstorming Handout**, students will identify a form of artistic expression they would like to make and reflect on the importance of art to them as individuals.
- As they complete the handout, circulate around the room to support student thinking. Encourage students to think about the stories of Arpi Krikorian, Jirayr Zorthian, and Alyce Vanley as they consider what art means to them.
- After brainstorming, allow students to use the remainder of the session to create their pieces of art.
- Consider forming a display of finished student work to showcase their takeaways about the relationship between art and resilience with others in the school.

Connection to Student's Lives	Connection to Contemporary Events	Connection to the Future
Students will deepen their knowledge of resilience and its relationship to art and build an understanding of the importance of art as a healing tool for those who have experienced traumatic events.	Students will analyze a contemporary example of how art has helped descendants of traumatic events build resilience by engaging with the story of Arpi Krikorian.	Students can use their understanding of art as a way to foster resilience in survivors and descendants of traumatic events to inform future advocacy efforts to build resilience in themselves and their community.

Survivor & Witness Biographies

Jiryar Zorthian was born on April 14th, 1911, in Kütahya, a small city in the historic Ottoman Empire, now part of modern-day Turkey. Jiryar remembers spending time as a young boy going to hantes (Armenian celebrations) with his parents and his siblings. During the years of the Armenian Genocide, Jiryar and his family had not known the fate of their father who was arrested. His father eventually returned after the World War I. However, continued persecutions of the Armenians and Greeks by Turkish Nationalists caused continued violence in Kütahya. After the city was liberated by the Greeks, Jiryar and his family eventually moved to the United States. Jiryar graduated from Yale University and became an artist. Jiryar was interviewed by the Armenian Film Foundation on February 15, 1991. His testimony is accessible in USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive.¹

Alyce Vanley was born on June 10, 1921 in California, USA. She was the daughter of Armenian Genocide survivor, Arous Sarkisian. Alyce was an Armenian-American artist who portrayed elements of Armenian culture and history in her artwork. Alyce was interviewed by the Armenian Film Foundation in February 1975 in Los Angeles, CA, United States. Her testimony is accessible in USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive.



National Standards and Frameworks

College, Career and Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards

- D2.Civ.6.3-5. Describe ways in which people benefit from and are challenged by working together, including through government, workplaces, voluntary organizations, and families.
- D2.Civ.10.K-2. Compare their own point of view with others' perspectives.
- D2.Civ.14.K-2. Describe how people have tried to improve their communities over time.
- D2.Civ.14.3-5. Illustrate historical and contemporary means of changing society.
- D2.His.6.3-5. Describe how people's perspectives shaped the historical sources they created.
- D2.His.16.3-5. Use evidence to develop a claim about the past.
- D3.1.3-5. Gather relevant information from multiple sources while using the origin, structure, and context to guide the selection.
- D3.4.3-5. Use evidence to develop claims in response to compelling questions.
- D4.3.K-2. Present a summary of an argument using print, oral, and digital technologies.
- D4.7.K-2. Identify ways to take action to help address local, regional, and global problems.

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.7: Conduct short research projects that build knowledge about a topic.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.3: Ask and answer questions about information from a speaker, offering appropriate elaboration and detail.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.4: Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.5: Create engaging audio recordings of stories or poems that demonstrate fluid reading at an understandable pace; add visual displays when appropriate to emphasize or enhance certain facts or details.

The Willesden Project is a global initiative that expands the reach of Lisa Jura's story of survival, resilience, and triumph as she struggles to come of age separated from her family during World War II, as originally shared by her daughter, author and concert pianist Mona Golabek, in *The Children of Willesden Lane* books and musical performances. [Learn more at The Willesden Project.](#)

The Armenian Genocide, 1915–1932



EDUCATOR HANDOUT

Setting the Stage

On October 29, 1914, the Ottoman Empire, led by the Young Turk government, entered the First World War on the side of the Central Powers—the German and Austro-Hungarian empires. Under the cover of war, the Armenian Christians, who were viewed as ethnic and religious others by the state, were targeted by the government for total destruction. This was part of a plan to form a Turkish state and expand Ottoman territories east, beyond the Armenian Highlands. These crimes against the Armenian people are known as the Armenian Genocide.

Genocide

In 1915, leaders of the Young Turk government began to eliminate its Armenian population through political orders of forced deportations and mass murder. To avoid any possible resistance, more than 200 Armenian community leaders were arrested on April 24th in Constantinople (Istanbul). Most were executed soon after.

In large groups, Armenians were forced out of their homes and pushed south toward the Syrian desert. Along the way, men were separated and killed, while women and children were forced to march under extreme harsh conditions. They were forcefully starved, without shelter and protection from harassment and violence. As Armenians were removed from their towns, new laws allowed for their homes, businesses and churches to be looted, confiscated and/or destroyed. Most Armenians survived death as a result of forced conversion to Islam, abduction, forced adoption, or by being sold or married into Turkish, Kurdish or Arab households. Others were saved due to aid from American and European missionary and relief organizations, while others were saved by neighbors who resisted political orders to harm Armenians.

End of the Ottoman Empire

By November 1918, Ottoman involvement in the First World War resulted in their defeat and the victorious Allied powers partitioned and occupied the empire. Between 1919 and 1920, the Ottomans held special military tribunals, which tried Young Turk leaders for

crimes such as intentional massacre, deportation, plunder of properties, torture and torment. The key leaders, Mehmed Talât, Ismail Enver, Ahmed Cemal, Dr. Mehmed Nazim and Dr. Behaddin Şakir were found guilty of first degree mass murder and were given the death penalty in absentia. However, this punishment was never followed through. Soon after, a Turkish nationalist movement led by General Mustafa Kemal formed to force Allied troops out. During this period, Armenians continued to be targets of genocidal policies. By 1923, General Mustafa Kemal and his forces went on to form the modern-day Republic of Turkey.

An estimated 1.5 million Armenians, approximately two-thirds of the pre-war Armenian population living in the Ottoman Empire, were murdered between 1915 and 1923. As of 2020, despite overwhelming evidence, scholarly research, and testimony of survivors and foreign witnesses that confirm the destruction of the Armenians as a genocide, the Turkish government continues to refuse to acknowledge its past crimes, denying the genocide at home and abroad.

Armenian Genocide Testimony

Firsthand experiences and memory of the Armenian Genocide are preserved in USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive through two collections—the Armenian Film Foundation collection and the Richard G. Hovannisian Armenian Genocide Oral History collection. Both collections give access to survivor testimonies and other eyewitness accounts, in addition to survivor descendant and scholar testimonies recorded between the 1970s to the early 2000s. The audiovisual testimonies from the Armenian Film Foundation were filmed for use in documentary films that would bring international awareness and education about the Armenian Genocide. The average length of these testimonies are about 20 minutes. The Richard G. Hovannisian Armenian Genocide Oral History collection consists of audio testimony recorded by university students, which offer a complete history of the life of Armenians, before, during and after the Armenian Genocide. The average length of these testimonies are about 90 minutes.

See-Wonder-Connect



STUDENT HANDOUT

Student/Group Name(s): _____

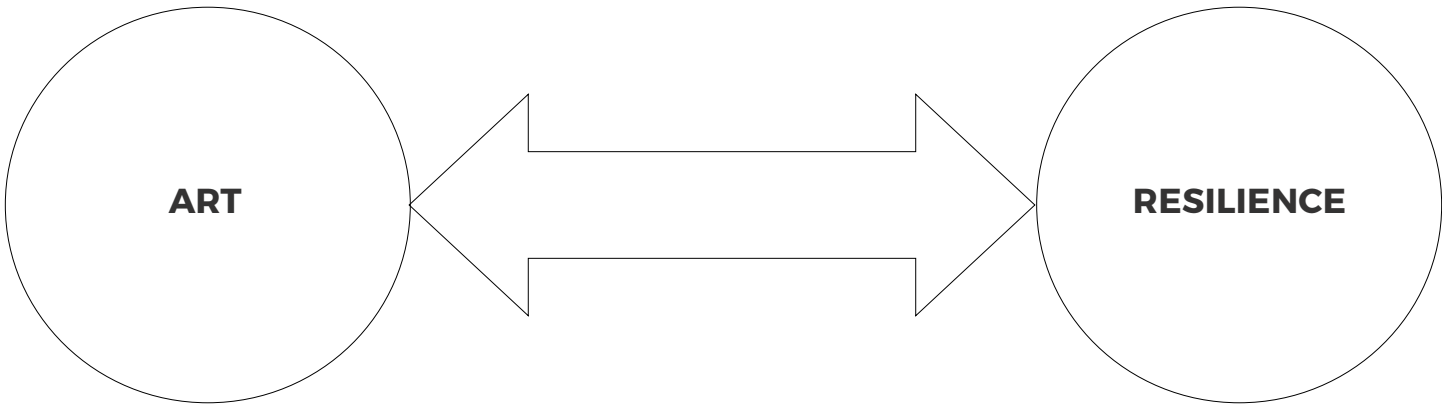
Name of Interviewee: _____

Experience Group: _____

Directions: Watch the video of Arpi Krikorian's story. Then complete the chart below, filling in what you see, what you wonder, and what connections you can make about her story.

SEE What do you see, observe or notice?	WONDER What do you wonder?	CONNECT What does this story remind you of? What connections can you make?

After thinking about the big ideas from Arpi Krikorian's story, how do you think art and resilience are connected? Fill in the arrow with your thoughts below.



Modified Testimony as Primary Source Analysis Chart



STUDENT HANDOUT

Interviewee Name: _____

Directions: As you watch the clip of testimony, write facts that are presented in the left column. Use the right column to note emotions the person demonstrates.

Facts: Who, What, Where, When, Why, How List the topic, dates, event details, location (city, region, country), and names/groups.	Emotions: What emotions did you notice? Notice facial and body expressions, tone of voice, pauses, and word choice.
Reflection Prompts (After viewing the testimony clip)	
How is art (painting, singing, dancing, etc.) part of this person's story?	
How is resilience part of this person's story?	

Artistic Expression Brainstorming



STUDENT HANDOUT

You will now create a piece of art that shows how art is meaningful to you in your life. Use the following list to select which form of art you would like to create or choose your own.

Forms of Artistic Expression		
Literature <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Poem■ Short story■ Lyrics	Visual Arts <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Drawing■ Painting	Graphic Arts <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Poster■ Digital illustration■ Comic strip
Decorative Arts <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Mosaic■ Collage	Performing Arts <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Dance■ Skit/play■ Song	Multimedia <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Podcast■ Video

Use the questions below to guide you as you think about the piece of art you will create.

How is art meaningful to you?

Brainstorm how you might show your answer to this question with art.