

INTRODUCTION

The *Turning a Blind Eye* Unit of Study is designed as a ready to use, flexible resource module that can be utilized to meet a variety of learning expectations and standards for teaching Social Studies at the high school level.

The Unit features three types of resource documents:

- Overview articles by acknowledged scholars for each area of the unit, as well as historical timelines and related data for background and historical context information.
- Original news articles that present primary source evidence of the differing viewpoints expressed by journalists and writers that were contemporary to the events covered.
- Informed commentary on the challenges facing both news providers and consumers today

Each primary document is accompanied by article/author specific background information, and a brief statement that provides additional context information as needed.

The 2013 revised edition of this Unit has expanded its Holodomor case study section to accommodate a plan of instruction based on Stanford’s “reading like a historian” model. The primary resource documents are organized in sets, with accompanying background information, guiding questions, and activities. Applicable CCSS-ELA standards are identified. The sets are designed to provide an excellent opportunity to advance skills in analyzing, integrating, and evaluating informational texts as students compare and contrast the conflicting news reports about the Holodomor. Additional secondary sources have been added to provide ready access to valuable historical context.

Turning a Blind Eye is centered around the premise that journalism and its broader incarnation today in a variety of media – plays an important role in informing the public regarding world events. In particular, the media play an important role in recognizing, acknowledging and disseminating information regarding such critical events as genocide and other deliberate mass killing, in order that an informed public may potentially respond with relief or political action.

The Unit utilizes the Holodomor, the famine -genocide that occurred in Ukraine and primarily ethnically Ukrainian regions of the Soviet Union in 1932-1933, as the central case study. Through the use of primary and secondary sources, students are given the opportunity to examine how strict censorship and the principle of propaganda as news characterized availability of information under Stalin; and how constraints on Western reporters, the personal “agendas” of some reporters, the prevailing support for the “Soviet experiment” among Western opinion makers, and economic and political decisions by Western governments were all factors that led the outside world to ignore the colossal loss of life in Soviet Ukraine, and the accompanying suppression of its national entity.

Similarly, students learn of the ultimate lack of Western response to the massive famine that occurred 30 years later during the “Great Leap Forward” in China under Mao Zedong’s leadership; and they will have an opportunity to investigate both the differences and the striking similarities in the factors that led to both tragedies languishing in the shadows of historical consciousness.

The final sections of the Unit bring the class into the 21st c. and provide an opportunity to compare how the challenges of recognizing and responding to world crises differ or remain the same today. First, the students will read and discuss how reporters have wrestled with the issues of presenting accurate, timely, and meaningful news regarding the crisis in Darfur.

Next, the students delve into the challenges facing today's generation: a world of dizzying social media options; strongly polarized political and special interest factions that discourage diversity and dissent; threats to the free use of internet and wireless media as well as traditional news outlets. On the other hand, the social media provide extraordinary potential for grass roots advocacy and citizen participation locally and worldwide.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

Students will be able to briefly summarize the causes, implementation, and results of the Holodomor and/or the Great Leap Forward Famine, and will be able to compare and contrast the basic characteristics of both famines.

Students will be able to integrate these events into the framework of other world events at the time.

Students will be able to identify and compare the constraints exercised by each government with regard to reporting on the famines that were created in their countries.

Students will be able to describe the major world political, economic and social climate during and shortly after these famines, as well as prevailing public opinion, and assess the effects of these on the reporting of the famines.

Students will be able to debate the philosophy of "the end justifies the means" as it was applied in real life during the totalitarian regimes of Stalin and Mao Zedong, and interpreted by some of the reporters.

Students will be able to assess and evaluate the extent to which the factors that affected the writing of conflicting reports about the famines in Ukraine and China exist in today's reporting of world news.

Students will demonstrate their facility in using the techniques of sourcing, contextualization, close reading and corroboration through in-class and homework exercises with the documents, as well as application to contemporary news, as assigned.

Desired outcome:

Students will apply the knowledge and critical thinking skills acquired in this Unit toward becoming more responsible and discriminating both as consumers and communicators of news and commentary in today's interactive media world.