

Srebrenica–Potočari Memorial Centre



Age group: 15 to 18 years old



Time: 90 to 120 mins



Key question: How can a memorial represent both remembrance and contestation at the same time?



Materials needed for the lesson: Source Worksheet and Examples of sources.

Skills and Concepts developed in the lesson plan:

Skills	Concepts
• Source analysis • Critical thinking • Multiperspectivity • Historical interpretation • Discussion and argumentation • Reflection and empathy	• Memory • Identity • Heritage • Narrative • Remembrance • Reconciliation • Contested History

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Explain the historical significance of the Srebrenica–Potočari Memorial Centre.
- Analyse different perspectives regarding the meaning of the memorial.
- Evaluate how monuments shape public memory.
- Compare personal testimonies, civic activism, and political narratives.
- Reflect on the role of memorials in post-conflict societies.

Curriculum Links:

- History of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995 War)
- Human Rights Education
- Civic Education
- Historical Inquiry and Source Analysis
- Multiperspectivity and Historical Interpretation

Pedagogical Recommendations:

Before the Lesson: Establish discussion norms:

- ★ Respect all participants.
- ★ Critique ideas, not individuals.
- ★ Support claims with evidence.

During the Lesson

- ★ Avoid positioning students as representatives of ethnic or political groups.
- ★ Encourage historical inquiry rather than personal confrontation.
- ★ Allow students time to process emotional reactions.

After the Lesson: Facilitate a brief debriefing discussion:

- ★ What did you find challenging?
- ★ Did any source change your perspective?
- ★ What responsibilities do societies have when remembering difficult histories?

Students should have basic knowledge of:

- ★ The Bosnian War (1992–1995)
- ★ The fall of Srebrenica in July 1995
- ★ The concept of a memorial or monument

If necessary, provide a short 10-minute overview before beginning the lesson.

Teacher Reflection (Post-Lesson)

After the lesson, consider:

- ★ Did students engage respectfully with differing perspectives?
- ★ Were students able to distinguish between historical evidence and political interpretation?
- ★ Which sources generated the most meaningful discussion?
- ★ How might the lesson be improved for future classes?
- ★ Did students demonstrate increased understanding of how monuments influence public memory?

Breakdown of Activities Step-by-step

Step 1

What Is a Monument? (10 minutes)

Display an image of the Srebrenica–Potočari Memorial Centre; use visuals:

- ★ Images of the Memorial Centre
- ★ White gravestones in Potočari

Ask students:

- ★ What messages does this site communicate?
- ★ Who is it intended for?
- ★ Why do societies build memorials?

Step 2

Historical Context (20 minutes)

Teacher provides a brief overview:

- ★ Srebrenica as a UN Safe Area
- ★ July 1995 events
- ★ Establishment of the Memorial Centre in 2003

Introduce the concept: Contested histories are different and often conflicting interpretations of the same past events.

Step 3

Source Investigation (30 to 40 minutes)

Divide students into four groups. Each group analyses one source (different perspective) and works on its source-analysis worksheet.

Group 1: Survivor Testimony

Focus questions:

- ★ What memories are being preserved?
- ★ Why is personal testimony important?

Source A: Survivor Perspective

Excerpt from Hasan Nuhanović's testimony or another testimony from the Srebrenica Memorial Centre.

"I come from Vlasenica, a little town in Eastern Bosnia, near Srebrenica. When the war broke out, I was in my fourth year in Sarajevo, studying mechanical engineering.

Many people were talking about leaving the country, but it was not an option for my parents. My brother was 17 and still at school. My father, Ibro, was managing a company of 500 employees in Vlasenica, half of them Serb. When I told him we had to prepare for war and suggested leaving the country, he said, "No, I have to look after my employees."...

Srebrenica was besieged. They were bombing the town—by artillery, from the air—for six months. People would go to their burned, destroyed villages and take cattle food out of their silos to eat. We were starving. Even though the Srebrenica fighters were trying to hold Serb forces back from the town, by March 1993 it became clear that they could no longer hold the lines.

On the very day that we thought the Serbs would take the town and massacre us all, we heard on the radio that the UN Security Council had declared Srebrenica a safe area. We didn't know what a UN safe area meant, but the word "safe" sounded promising.

The UN's arrival froze the genocide that was taking place against the Bosniak people. We knew that if the Serbs attacked Srebrenica again, and the UN didn't stop them, there would undoubtedly be another massacre. When the UN called for NATO air strikes to stop the attack on the "safe area" of Goražde in 1994, we thought the UN would do the same if anything happened in Srebrenica. That is why, when July 1995 came, everyone expected to hear the sound of NATO jets until the moment when the town finally fell.

The attack started on 6 July. I had been translating for the UN, but I had promised my parents I would collect my brother if it looked like the town would fall, so I went under heavy fire to fetch him. He was the first civilian inside the UN base at Potočari.

My parents arrived with the large crowd of older men, women, and children who came to the base when the town fell. They were among the first to arrive, so they managed to get inside the base. Twenty-five thousand others were not so lucky and were left outside when the Dutch closed the gates.

When the Serbs arrived on 12 July, they separated all the men and boys from outside the base and deported all the women and girls, but they did not enter the base itself.

I thought we would be safe inside, but then the Dutch soldiers told those inside the base to get out. Under the UN flag, 5,000 refugees were marched to the gate one by one, where the Serbs took the men and boys to their deaths. My family was one of the last to leave. The Dutch told me, "Tell your family to leave. They can't stay here anymore." I never saw them again.

From that day until today, 23 years later, I have needed to find out what happened to my family and to the other people who were missing. At first, I wasn't even thinking about justice. I just wanted to find out what happened.

I was begging the government of the Netherlands to tell me and to start an investigation into those who had made the decision to turn the refugees out at Potočari, but they wouldn't engage with me. They said I was too emotional, too loud.

Then, finally, a Dutch lawyer came to me and said, "I'll represent you." We didn't expect to win, but I wanted to get to the truth. We couldn't establish the truth any other way, so we would try to do it in the courtroom.

It took ten years and so many obstacles to get to the final judgment that we both nearly gave up, but we never did.

The final verdict, from the Supreme Court of the Netherlands, was all in Dutch, but I remember looking over at the lawyer, and she was smiling. It was the first time ever that a government had been found liable for its troops on a UN mission.

I didn't feel victory, or even satisfaction. I just felt relieved that this fight was over. I was thinking about my parents and my brother. I was doing this for them. What else could I have done?

My father was identified ten years after he was killed in the genocide. Like most victims, he was identified by the International Commission for Missing Persons using DNA. My brother and mother were identified after fifteen years. All three of them are buried in the graveyard at Potočari.

I've had to fight so long and so hard just to find out what happened, who was responsible, and even to establish the Memorial Centre where they are buried. Even after 23 years, our story is still not finished."

For more information, please see:

<https://srebrenica.org.uk/survivor-stories/the-courage-to-speak-out-hasan-nuhanovic>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AepwIhSbAws>

Group 2: International Community (UN Resolution on Srebrenica)

Focus questions:

- ★ What criticisms are made of the international community?
- ★ What responsibilities do peacekeepers have?

Source B: International Perspective

UN Resolution on Srebrenica:

<https://docs.un.org/en/A/res/78/282>

Group 3: Women in Black remembrance of Srebrenica in Scotland

Focus questions:

- ★ Why do these women commemorate Srebrenica in Belgrade?
- ★ What message are they sending?

Source C: Civic Remembrance

Photograph and short article about Women in Black commemorations in Belgrade.

https://srebrenica.org.uk/what-happened/not-in-our-name-the-women-in-black?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Or Srebrenica in Scotland: <https://srebrenica.scot/>

Group 4: Political contestation source

Focus questions:

- ★ Why might some political actors oppose certain forms of remembrance?
- ★ How does politics influence memory?

Source D: Political Contestation

Statement regarding opposition to the UN Srebrenica Remembrance Resolution.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić on UN resolution on Srebrenica -

<https://www.rferl.org/a/un-srebrenica-resolution-bosnia-genocide/32960943.html>

Bosnian Serb leader on genocide in Srebrenica -

<https://www.rferl.org/a/republika-srpska-dodik-srebrenica-genocide-denied/32911356.html>

Students complete a source-analysis worksheet while reading and working on their source material.

Step 4

Gallery Walk and Discussion (15–20 minutes)

Groups present their findings. As a class, create a chart or Padlet wall for each group:

Perspective	Main Message
Survivors	
International Community	
Women in Black	
Political Actors	

Discussion:

- ★ Which perspectives are most visible at the memorial?
- ★ Which perspectives are less visible?
- ★ Can multiple perspectives coexist?

Step 5

Reflection (10–15 minutes)

Students individually respond to:

Should memorials only commemorate the past, or should they also encourage dialogue about difficult historical issues?

Worksheet for the students

Source Analysis Worksheet

Contested Memory and Public Space: Srebrenica–Potočari Memorial Centre

Name: _____

Source Number: _____

Source Type: ☐ Testimony ☐ Photograph ☐ Political Statement ☐ News Article ☐ Memorial Text ☐ Other

Part I – Understanding the Source

1. Who created this source?

2. When was it created?

3. What is the purpose and the content of the source?

Summarise the main message in 2–3 sentences.

Part II – Perspective

4. Whose perspective is represented?

- ☐ Survivor
- ☐ Family member of victims
- ☐ Political leader
- ☐ International organisation

☐ Civil society activist

☐ Historian

☐ Other: _____

5. What experiences or interests might influence this perspective?

6. What emotions or values are expressed in the source?

☐ Grief

☐ Justice

☐ Responsibility

☐ Pride

☐ Reconciliation

☐ Anger

☐ Fear

☐ Hope

☐ Other: _____

Provide evidence:

Part III – Memory and Representation

7. How does this source describe or represent Srebrenica?

8. What message does the source communicate about the memorial?

9. Does the source encourage remembrance, reconciliation, accountability, or something else? Explain your answer.

Part IV – Critical Thinking

10. What information is included in the source?

11. What information is missing or not discussed?

12. Why might this information have been omitted?

Part V – Evaluating the Source

13. Is this source useful for understanding the significance of the Srebrenica Memorial Centre?

- ☐ Very useful
- ☐ Somewhat useful
- ☐ Limited usefulness

Explain:

14. What are the values of this source?

15. What are its limitations?

Part VI – Comparing Perspectives

After listening to the presentations of other groups:

16. Which perspective was most similar to your source?

17. Which perspective was most different from your source?

18. Why do you think these perspectives differ?

Final Reflection Key Question:

How can a memorial represent both remembrance and contestation at the same time?

Using evidence from at least two sources studied today, write a short response (100–150 words).

Assessment Rubric

Formative Assessment

We recommend using a simple 4-level rubric (Beginning – Developing – Proficient – Advanced). This is easy for teachers to use during classroom observation and aligns well with inquiry-based learning and historical thinking.

Throughout the lesson, assess:

- ★ Participation in discussion
- ★ Source analysis
- ★ Quality of questions raised
- ★ Engagement with different perspectives

Criteria	Beginning (1)	Developing (2)	Proficient (3)	Advanced (4)
Participation in Discussion	Rarely participates or requires frequent prompting.	Participates occasionally but contributions are limited.	Participates regularly and contributes relevant ideas.	Actively contributes, encourages others, and enriches discussion with thoughtful insights.
Source Analysis	Identifies basic information but struggles to interpret sources.	Demonstrates partial understanding of source content and perspective.	Accurately analyses source content, perspective, and purpose.	Demonstrates sophisticated analysis, identifying nuance, context, and limitations of sources.
Quality of Questions Raised	Questions are mostly factual and require little interpretation.	Asks some relevant questions but with limited depth.	Asks thoughtful questions that support historical inquiry.	Raises complex questions that challenge assumptions and deepen understanding of contested histories.
Engagement with Different Perspectives	Shows limited awareness of perspectives different from their own.	Acknowledges other perspectives but with limited analysis.	Demonstrates understanding of multiple perspectives and uses evidence to explain them.	Critically evaluates multiple perspectives and recognises how identity, memory, and context shape interpretation.

Student Self-Assessment

Statement	Yes	Partly	Not Yet
I contributed to class discussions.	☐	☐	☐
I used evidence from sources to support my ideas.	☐	☐	☐
I listened respectfully to different perspectives.	☐	☐	☐
I understand why the Srebrenica Memorial Centre can be viewed differently by different groups.	☐	☐	☐
I can explain how monuments influence public memory.	☐	☐	☐

Exit Ticket for students:

1. What is one thing you learned today?
2. Which source influenced your thinking the most?
3. Why can monuments become contested?

Monument information background

Monument Name: Srebrenica–Potočari Memorial Centre

Representation: Site / Cemetery

Type: Memorial

Date of Inauguration: 2003

Dedication: Dedicated to the victims of the Srebrenica genocide of July 1995

Historical Legacies: War and Conflict, Sectarianism

Authority: Bosnian Government

Remedies used to deal with the contestations: Contextualisation, Repurpose and Status Quo

Fictional Representation? No.

The Srebrenica–Potočari Memorial Centre is one of the most significant sites of remembrance in Bosnia and Herzegovina and serves as a place of commemoration for the victims of the Srebrenica genocide. Located in Potočari, near the town of Srebrenica, the memorial was established to preserve the memory of the more than 8,000 Bosniak men and boys who were murdered in July 1995 during the Bosnian War. Today, the site functions as a cemetery, museum, documentation centre, and educational institution dedicated to preserving historical evidence and promoting dialogue about the past.

The origins of the Memorial Centre are closely connected to the events of the Bosnian War (1992–1995). During the conflict, Srebrenica became an enclave inhabited primarily by Bosniak civilians who had fled violence in surrounding areas. In 1993, the United Nations declared Srebrenica a "safe area" and stationed Dutch peacekeepers (Dutchbat) there to protect the civilian population. However, in July 1995, forces of the Army of Republika Srpska captured the enclave. In the days that followed, more than 8,000 Bosniak men and boys were systematically separated from their families and killed, while thousands of women, children, and elderly people were forcibly expelled. International courts, including the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), later ruled that these crimes constituted genocide. Following years of advocacy by survivors and victims' families, particularly the Mothers of Srebrenica association, the former UN base in Potočari was transformed into a memorial site. The Memorial Centre was established in 2000 by a decision of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the official opening ceremony took place in 2003. Since then, thousands of identified victims have been buried at the memorial cemetery, and annual commemorations are held on 11 July. In addition to remembrance activities, the Centre collects testimonies, preserves archives, conducts research, and develops educational programmes aimed at combating genocide denial and promoting human rights education.

Despite broad international recognition, the memory of Srebrenica remains contested in parts of the Western Balkans. For many survivors, families of victims, and international organisations, the Memorial Centre represents a place of mourning, remembrance, justice, and learning. It serves as a reminder of the consequences of hatred, discrimination, and political violence. However, some political actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina and neighbouring Serbia continue to challenge or reject the use of the term "genocide," despite the rulings of international courts. These disputes became particularly visible in 2024 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution establishing 11 July as the International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica. Supporters viewed the resolution as an important step toward preserving historical memory and combating denial, while opponents argued that it could stigmatise entire communities rather than focus on individual responsibility. As a result, the Srebrenica–Potočari Memorial Centre represents more than a place of remembrance. It is also an example of how monuments and memorials can become sites where different interpretations of history, identity, responsibility, and justice intersect. This makes it a valuable case study for examining contested histories and understanding how societies remember difficult pasts.

Monument Pictures



[Srebrenica Potočari Memorial Center](#). Via Wikimedia Images
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[Monument with names of killed people from Area of East Bosnia](#). Via Wikimedia Images CC
BY-SA 4.0



[Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial stone](#) (Caption states: Number of victims of genocide according to last data, number is not final). Via Wikimedia Commons Public Domain.