

The Reckoning Project @ WCEE

Investigating War Crimes in Ukraine

M | LSA WEISER CENTER FOR
EUROPE & EURASIA
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Teaching Guide



Photo: Andrii Bashtovyi / The Reckoning Project. Kharkiv.

www.thereckoningproject-wcee.org



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The Reckoning Project

The Reckoning Project (TRP) is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 2022, shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It was created by three renowned journalists:

- **Janine di Giovanni**, an American war correspondent with experience reporting on the conflicts in Syria, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Chechnya;
- **Natalia Gumenyuk**, a Ukrainian journalist known for her reporting on human rights and democratic movements;
- **Peter Pomerantsev**, a British author and expert on propaganda and media influence.

Drawing from lessons learned in previous conflicts—where journalistic evidence often failed to meet the strict standards required in court—TRP was established to **document war crimes in Ukraine** and ensure that evidence collected could be used to support **the legal prosecution of war criminals**. TRP's unique approach combines **frontline journalism** with **international legal expertise**. Journalists, researchers, and legal professionals work side-by-side to collect, verify, and legally prepare eyewitness accounts of war crimes. TRP reporters conduct in-depth interviews with survivors and witnesses, often under dangerous conditions in areas affected by conflict. These stories are carefully documented using ethical and legal standards so that they can be used in courts like the **International Criminal Court (ICC)**. While these testimonies are essential for building a legal and historical record, they do not represent the full scope of atrocities committed in Ukraine.

The Reckoning Project and the University of Michigan

In August 2022, the **Weiser Center for Europe and Eurasia (WCEE)** at the University of Michigan began collaborating with TRP to support its mission through research and expand its impact with ambitious educational programs.

WCEE created a program called **The Reckoning Project @ WCEE: Ukraine Testifies**, which brought together faculty and 18 students (undergraduate and graduate) who were trained in different methodologies and provided important analysis to TRP. Students, working in teams supervised by faculty, translated, edited, and analyzed summaries of testimonies provided by TRP, preparing them for TRP's Data Specialist and legal team. The WCEE team assisted with over 300 incidents, many of which are in active stages of legal processing in Ukraine and beyond.

The Reckoning Project @ WCEE also developed interactive tools for educating students and the broader public about the war in Ukraine. On the second anniversary of Russia's full scale-invasion, WCEE launched a website featuring an online archive of TRP testimonies and two interactive maps showing where war crimes were reported by TRP. One map uses a real-time event tracking system developed at U-M by Professor Yurii Zhukov to show troop movements, conquered/contested territories, and violent incidents. These tools are now part of an educational program helping students better understand the war in Ukraine and the importance of international justice.

Scan here to explore the website:



Disclaimer

Incidents included on The Reckoning Project @ WCEE website and discussed in these materials are considered for legal prosecution, which prohibits the disclosure of certain information and/or the inclusion of certain details. The identities of witnesses, victims, and The Reckoning Project’s researchers are concealed for their protection.

Content Advisory

The teaching resources for The Reckoning Project at WCEE: Ukraine Testifies address sensitive topics related to the war in Ukraine. The teaching unit includes discussions of war crimes and mentions of graphic violence, which can exacerbate trauma related to these events. This content may be particularly distressing for individuals who have been affected by the ongoing war and its repercussions.

Before using the teaching resources and The Reckoning Project’s materials, please review the teaching packet documents and engage in thoughtful discussions with colleagues, families, and students about the content.

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Questions and Objectives

Ukraine Testifies



Possible Driving Questions

- What does justice look like in the violent context of war?
- What makes a violent act in wartime a crime and who should be held responsible?
- How should we hold perpetrators of war crimes accountable? What might justice and reparations look like for victims?
- To what extent are war crimes being committed in Ukraine and who should be held responsible?

Supporting Questions

- What are the causes and effects of the current war in Ukraine and who is fighting?
- What is the historical context of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia?
- What are war crimes and who has the authority to prosecute them?
- What is the historical context of the concept of war crimes?
- How are war crimes investigated?
- What kind of evidence is used in the investigation of war crimes?
- What war crimes appear to have been committed in Ukraine and by whom?
- Are there patterns or trends in the war crimes that have been committed in Ukraine?

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to summarize and explain the historical and political background of the current war in Ukraine.
- Students will be able to summarize the definition of war crimes and identify broad categories.
- Students will be able to use data to identify patterns of war crimes and human rights abuses in Ukraine.
- Students will be able to generate recommendations for prosecutable war crimes based on evidence and legal principles.
- Students will be able to develop and explain a plan for further investigation into a specific alleged war crime.
- Students will consider their own personal reactions to the issue of war crimes and have the opportunity to take informed action in support of global human rights.

Content Expectations / Standards

HS World History

7.1 Global or Cross-Temporal Expectations Analyze the impact of changes in global balances of military, political, economic, and technological power throughout the 20th century and to the present.

7.1.1 Power and Resistance – describe the global reconfigurations and restructuring of political and economic relationships throughout the 20th century and to the present, including state-organized efforts to expand power and the role of resistance movements against such efforts.

7.1.2 Global Conflict – compare and contrast the nature, extent, and impact of modern warfare with warfare in the previous eras, including the roles of ideology, technology, and civilians.

7.1.3 Genocide in the 20th Century – differentiate genocide from other atrocities and forms of mass killing and explain its extent, causes, and consequences in the 20th century and to the present.

CG Contemporary Global Issues

How have world historical events, patterns, and forces shaped contemporary global issues? To what extent are contemporary global issues a continuation of world historical trends? Students can investigate questions such as these, and/or pose their own questions about contemporary global issues, focusing on themes like population, resources, global interactions, conflict, cooperation, and security. Individually and collaboratively, students can use maps, graphs, primary sources, and other documents in planned inquiries.

CG4 Conflict, Cooperation, and Security

Analyze the causes and challenges of continuing and new conflicts by describing:

- tensions resulting from ethnic, territorial, religious, and/or nationalist differences.
- causes of and responses to ethnic cleansing/genocide/mass killing.
- local and global attempts at peacekeeping, security, democratization, and administration of international justice and human rights.
- the types of warfare used in these conflicts, including terrorism, private militias, and new technologies.

HS United States History

9.2 Changes in America's Role in the World. Examine the shifting role of the United States on the world stage from 1980 to the present.

9.2.1 United States in the Post-Cold War World – explain the role of the United States as a superpower in the post-Cold War world, including advantages, disadvantages, and new challenges.

9.3 Policy Debates

9.3.1 Make a persuasive argument on a public policy issue, and justify the position with evidence from historical antecedents and precedents, and Democratic Values or Constitutional Principles.

ELA: Reading Standards for Informational Text 6–12

11–12

1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
2. Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.
3. Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

Key Concepts

- Sovereignty
- War crimes
- Genocide
- Crimes against humanity
- Human rights
- Jurisdiction
- Justice
- Impunity

Teacher Preparation and Instructional Resources

- Before engaging with these materials, it is important that teachers have established a positive classroom culture with productive discussion norms.
- Given the emotional weight of these issues and the incidents of war crimes that students will be studying, it is crucial that teachers prepare their students as well as communicate with parents and administrators. How this plays out will vary from school to school, but some sort of trigger warning should be considered.
- It is also important to help students understand that the stories and testimonies they will engage with are from real people who have undergone great trauma. At the same time, it will be important for teachers to help students see the resilience and resourcefulness demonstrated by survivors. The resources linked below provide some valuable tips to help approach this important work.

We **highly recommend** reading these before using these materials:

<https://www.common sense media.org/articles/how-to-talk-with-kids-about-violence-crime-and-war>

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/discussing-war-and-conflict-resources-for-educators-parents-and-caregivers>

- These materials are most easily accessed online, so students will need Internet access and devices.

Lesson Sequence – Unit Overview

Lesson 1 The War in Ukraine: Historical Context

Objective: Build background knowledge on the war in Ukraine

Students begin by considering and responding to an open-ended question about war crimes or rules for war. They then develop a timeline of the war in Ukraine after reading background articles. In the process, they will also consider the concept of sovereignty and review the broad causes of the war. They also create a map to provide geographic context.

Lesson 2 What Are War Crimes? What Does Justice Look Like?

Objective: Build background knowledge on war crimes

In this lesson, students watch a video about war crimes and read key excerpts from UN documents and international agreements. They then work collaboratively to understand what war crimes are and complete summary and analysis tasks that will set them up to look for patterns across a series of incidents in Ukraine.

Teachers also have the option of including lesson 2A, which is an exploration of past prosecutions of war crimes as well as a discussion of the relationship between the United States and issues of justice for war crimes. *Although this optional extension adds time to the overall duration of the unit and also ventures into more potentially controversial content, it also covers important content and is worth exploration*

Lesson 3 Looking for Patterns of War Crimes

Objective: Apply knowledge to real world examples

Students next use an online map tool to analyze patterns of war crimes in Ukraine. Based on their exploration of the map and a review of war crimes from Lesson 2, they will generate an evidence-based conclusion about patterns of war crimes in Ukraine

Lesson 4 Incident Case Studies

Objective: Learn how to work with archival materials

Students then work in collaborative groups to analyze one incident using the Rome Statute in order to identify what war crimes may have been perpetrated. Student groups collaborate to explain why they think their particular incident maps onto a particular set of criteria for different war crimes, and they make a recommendation for which crimes they think will be most relevant for prosecutors based on available evidence.

Project options: Choose your own adventure

After completing lessons 1 through 4, teachers can select from the options below for culminating project activities. Consider students' voices and choices in this process! Depending on time and student interest, teachers can choose to engage in all of the options below, they can adapt or merge them, or select only one.

Included in the student handouts are planning guides for each of these project options. Planning guides should be carefully reviewed with a whole class activity to clarify expectations for whichever project options students are pursuing. These projects can be adopted, extended, or combined to suit your classroom needs.

Project option A Planning an investigation

Students review excerpts of the Berkeley protocol in order to consider the complications of open-source investigations. Then, using a template, student groups generate a list of questions and an investigation plan to make the case that this is a crime worth pursuing and prosecuting. In this process, they consider the types of evidence they would likely be able to gather, including open-source evidence, and they consider the ethical and legal aspects of their investigation.

Students then present an argument to the class about which crime they think is best to prosecute for a particular incident, presenting their reasoning and outlining their plan of investigation through a multimedia presentation or informational poster.

Project option B Taking informed action

Students will reflect on what they have learned and reconsider the phrase *Justice delayed is justice denied*. They will select an activity from a choice board that engages them more directly with taking action or developing a personal response to issues of war crimes and justice.

Sample rubrics that might be good models:

<https://crfcap.org/images/pdf/Rubrics.pdf>

https://hclangarts8.weebly.com/uploads/2/5/3/2/25322002/rubric_for_creative_projects.pdf

Additional Extension Ideas *(developed materials not provided)*

Comparative analyses

Using historical accounts from eyewitnesses associated with the Holocaust, the Ottoman Empire/Armenia, Kosovo, etc., students can evaluate how the current evidence compares and contrasts with historical cases that have been prosecuted.

Potential resources:

Justice and Judgement after the Holocaust:

<https://www.facinghistory.org/en-gb/resource-library/justice-judgement-after-holocaust-uk>

Armenian Genocide:

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/genocide-under-cover-war-0>

Ethnic cleansing in Kosovo

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/cleansing/>

War crimes and gender-based violence in Bosnia:

https://www.pbs.org/wnet/women-war-and-peace/files/2011/10/TruthandConsequences_PRINT.pdf

Simulations

In classrooms with more time, external resources are linked below to support the development of an ICC case simulation or mock trial.

<https://education.cfr.org/teach/simulation/russia-and-nato-baltics-nsc/educator-overview>

<https://education.cfr.org/teach/mini-simulation/defending-ukraine>

Additional External Resources

Learn more about the International Criminal Court and its work in Ukraine :

<https://www.icc-cpi.int/get-involved/teachers-high-school-students>

<https://www.icc-cpi.int/situations/ukraine>

Explore additional resources related to Ukraine:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/how-are-war-crimes-ukraine-being-investigated-2023-02-23/>

<https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/04/ukraine-justice-war-crimes-must-begin-evidence>

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/10-maps-that-explain-ukraines-struggle-for-independence/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/04/briefing/ukraine-russia-damage.html>

<https://www.pbs.org/video/children-of-ukraine-5uuz4h/>

A Ukrainian poetry collection about the war:

<https://poetizer.com/westandwithu.pdf>

External lesson plans:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/16/learning/lesson-plans/teaching-resources-to-help-students-make-sense-of-the-war-in-ukraine.html>

<https://www.choices.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Background-2.pdf>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/02/learning/lesson-plans/teaching-about-a-year-of-war-in-ukraine.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/24/learning/lesson-plans/lesson-of-the-day-the-invasion-of-ukraine-how-russia-attacked-and-what-happens-next.html>

Lesson 1

The War in Ukraine: Historical Context

Objective: Build background knowledge on the war in Ukraine

Ukraine Testifies



Preparation and set up

Before beginning this mini-unit, let students know it is coming and emphasize the seriousness of the subject matter. Touch base with any students you think might have particularly strong reactions to the content and make sure you have established guidelines and procedures for difficult conversations and help-seeking. Please review the resources suggested in the unit introduction.

Opening

① Read the following prompt and then ask students to stop and think for a moment and then jot down some initial responses:

- War is, by definition, violent conflict and one of the goals of warfare is to kill the enemy. So what makes a violent act in wartime a crime? When and why do violent acts cross the line? Who decides what is a crime and who should be held responsible?

When they have had enough time to jot down some initial ideas, ask students to turn and talk and share something from their response with someone sitting near them. Then ask several different pairs to share something from their conversation with the whole class and encourage students to respond to each other's ideas.

Next, share the following **two scenarios** with the students:

A) During a battle between the armies of two different nations, the digital guidance system for a missile malfunctions. The missile goes off its intended pathway and hits a civilian neighborhood, killing several people.

B) During a battle between the armies of two different nations, a group of soldiers seek shelter in a mall in a crowded civilian neighborhood. The opposing army has been tracking the soldiers with drone surveillance and is aware that they are hiding in an area filled with civilians. They decide to launch a missile anyway and are able to kill some of the soldiers, but in the process also kill several civilians.

Ask the students to discuss how the two incidents are different, even though they had similar results. Ask them which one is more likely to be a war crime and have them explain why they think this is the case.

Explain to the class that these are complicated questions that they will consider in-depth over the next several lessons as they learn about war crimes in the current war between Ukraine and Russia.

Inquiry and analysis

② Now tell students they are going to engage in a list-group-label brainstorming activity to surface what they already know, and then they will build some valuable background knowledge about Ukraine and the ongoing war.

Organize students into small groups of three or four and make sure they have scrap paper or sticky notes. Ask students to generate a list of facts they know or ideas they have about either Ukraine or the ongoing war in Ukraine. When all the groups have several ideas listed, ask them to organize their ideas into categories or groups and then give each group a label or name (for example, categories might include geographic locations, technology and weapons, leaders, etc.). If students struggle with grouping and labeling, just have them focus on generating facts and ideas.

Then ask several different groups to share what they know and invite them to ask each other questions or add to each other's thinking. This activity should give you a quick snapshot of students' prior knowledge and may help you tailor the lesson to their needs.

③ Next, pass out the *Lesson 1 Student Handout*. Alternatively, students can use the article at this link: <https://www.history.com/news/ukraine-timeline-invasions>

Students are to read the historical overview of Ukraine and the war in Ukraine and then develop a timeline using the provided table in the handout to summarize key events. This can be structured in different ways and should be carried out in a way that meets your students' learning needs. Options include reading the article together as a whole class with different students taking different sections and then having students work in pairs or small groups on the timeline. Alternatively, you might have students complete the whole reading and timeline in small groups or even as independent homework.

There are three stop-and-jot prompts embedded in the text to help chunk the content and give students a moment to pause and reflect. If you are reading the article as a whole class use these moments as discussion opportunities. If students are reading through them in small groups, have students pause and discuss each question as a group.

As students work, move through the room probing for understanding and monitoring progress. When most students have identified several key events, different people share overviews of their timelines and discuss which events seem to be the most important with respect to the development of the war.

Now ask students to complete the connection questions at the end of the timeline table in small groups and be ready to share their thoughts. Alternatively, you can approach these questions through whole class discussion.

④ Explain to the class that the timeline activity was meant to give them a sense of when key events occurred and that now they will work with maps to better understand where these things occurred. Review the blank map and the instructions in the

student handout and direct students to whatever resources are available for them to use (online map collections and atlases, textbooks, hardcopy atlases, etc.). Give students time to complete their maps. If possible, use your smart board or a wall map and have different students come up and point out key locations on the map as a means to process and check for understanding.

Sharing and Reflection

- ⑤ To close out this lesson, ask students to use a 3-2-1 routine. Have them stop and jot and then turn and talk to:
- List three important facts they learned about Ukraine and/or the war in Ukraine.
 - Describe two connections they made between what they learned in this lesson and what they have learned in past lessons, particularly related to the Cold War or World War II.
 - Generate a new question they have about Ukraine or the war in Ukraine.
- ⑥ Invite different students to share different components of their 3-2-1 responses, encouraging them to support, add to, or politely challenge each other's ideas

Assessment

There are multiple opportunities to assess student learning and thinking during this lesson. As always, teachers can engage in formative assessment by probing student thinking with open-ended questions, listening carefully to group discussions and work conversations, and pressing students to explain their thinking behind certain answers. The written timeline assignment and connection questions can be collected and graded for completion and accuracy as well.

Lesson 2

What are War Crimes?

Objective: Build background knowledge on war crimes



Photo: Timothy Fadek

Preparation and set up

This lesson involves a handout packet with multiple components. Students should work through these materials in collaborative groups. Before teaching, review the handout so that you can decide how you want to provide access to it, either through printed packets or using digital tools like Google Docs. Students can continue to work in the same groups from lesson one or you can choose to create new collaborative groups.

Opening

① Start Lesson 2 by asking students to Stop and Jot in response to the following prompt: Why do you think the international community has tried to create sets of rules that regulate warfare? What is the point of having rules during a war?

Once students have had time to get down some initial thoughts, have them turn and talk and share with a partner, then ask different students to share some key ideas from their conversations.

Then explain that there are collections of laws and agreements that collectively are known as International Humanitarian Law (IHL) that seek to limit the effects of armed conflict. These laws lay out the responsibilities of states and non-state armed groups during an armed conflict. Tell them that in this lesson they will focus on a specific aspect of IHL — war crimes — in order to prepare them for an analysis of particular incidents that have taken place during the war in Ukraine.

Inquiry and analysis

② Next, pass out the Lesson 2 Student Handout (at least the video viewing guide) and tell students they are going to watch a video explaining war crimes. Review the questions in the viewing guide and direct the students to jot down responses as they watch. Structure the activity as best suits your context and technology access. Play the video, pausing as needed to allow students to take notes, and have students answer the questions based on the video content.

Video: *War Crimes Explained: The Rules of War, Crimes Against Humanity & Genocide*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0RydVCnco4>

When students have completed the viewing guide, review as a class and discuss their responses. As needed, use Talk Moves like “Say more...” and “What makes you say that?” to press students to expand on their thinking.

③ Now that students have a sense of what war crimes are, explain that the idea of war crimes is something that has developed over time in response to events in different conflicts. Direct their attention to, or pass out, the Timeline Review activity (pages 2-3 of the Lesson 2 Handout), have students review the timeline, and then have them work with a partner to respond to the reflection question at the end (below).

Timeline reflection question: Use at least 3 examples to explain how specific patterns of violence during different conflicts led to important changes or developments in international law related to war crimes.

④ Transition into the next activity by telling the students that they may have noticed references to other types of violations of international humanitarian law as they learned about war crimes. Explain that in this activity they will learn a bit about some of these other violations and will compare them to war crimes.

Have students read the article in the handout about the International Criminal Court and its jurisdiction. This can be read individually, in pairs or small groups, or with the whole class.

When ready, explain that they will now seek to better understand war crimes by comparing them to these other violations of international law: genocide, crimes against humanity, and aggression. Explain that all of these have some overlap, but that there are things that make each of them unique as well. Sometimes specific incidents may involve elements of more than one of these violations of international law as well.

Direct the students to first complete the semantic feature analysis, which is a way of comparing these different violations. Review the characteristics that are listed in the columns. Then explain to the students that they have to decide whether or not that characteristic applies to each of the violations of international law listed. This activity can be done individually, in pairs, in small groups, or even as a whole class if students struggle a bit. Let students know that some characteristics may apply to more than one category of violation.

When they are done, process this activity by asking students to talk with a partner or in small groups about what makes each of these violations unique. Then direct students to complete the additional table by providing a definition and example of each type of violation. Examples can be historical incidents or scenarios that students develop.

⑤ Tell the students that they are next going to look at specific sections of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Explain that the Rome Statute is the treaty that established the International Criminal Court and was adopted at a diplomatic conference in Rome, Italy on July 17th, 1998. It entered into force on July 1st, 2002; 124 nations have signed on to this agreement.

Working in small groups, have the students read the provided excerpts of article 82 of the Rome Statute (in the handout). As they read, they should highlight unfamiliar or new words that seem important to the explanation of war crimes.

When each group is done, they should review their vocabulary list at the end of the article and look for terms they have highlighted. They should read the definition and then reread the section where the word was used to clarify any misunderstandings they may have had.

Finally, as a group, they should discuss which five of the specific crimes listed in Article 82 they predict will be the most common in the war in Ukraine. They should be prepared to share their lists and the thinking behind them in a whole group conversation.

When they are ready, have each group share any questions they have about the Rome Statute and also their list of the five crimes they predict will be the most common. Have them explain their thinking as well.

Sharing and Reflection

⑥ To close out this lesson, ask students to reflect on what they have learned about war crimes using a thinking routine from *Facing History and Ourselves* called *Head, Heart, Conscience* (below). This can be done as a silent stop and jot, as an exit pass that you collect, or even as a turn-and-talk or small group conversation. However you carry it out, be sure to build in time for whole group sharing.

Head, Heart, Conscience Reflection... Respond to **one** prompt from each section.

Head

- What new information do you know about war crimes?
- What additional information would you like to have to help you better understand the concept of war crimes?

Heart

- What emotions does this topic bring up for you?
- Are there particular examples that stand out to you? If so, why?

Conscience

- What questions about fairness or justice does this topic raise for you?
- How do you think real people are impacted by war crimes? Are there people who should be held accountable? If so, how?

Assessment

There are multiple opportunities to assess student learning and thinking during this lesson. As always, teachers can engage in formative assessment by probing student thinking with open-ended questions, listening carefully to group discussions and work conversations, and pressing students to explain their thinking behind certain answers. The graphic organizers can be collected and graded for completion and accuracy as well.

Lesson 2A

What Does Justice Look Like?

Objective: Build background knowledge on war crimes

This optional extension to lesson 2 explores past prosecutions of war crimes in different judicial venues, introduces students to the complex relationship between the United States and the International Criminal Court, and explores instances of war crimes committed by United States soldiers.

The extension activity is a reading guide with Stop and Jot and Turn-and-Talk prompts and graphic organizers added in. To include it, teachers can have students read through the documents in pairs or small groups and complete the activities as directed in the reading guide. As needed, the entire class can be brought together for discussions of the questions and activities. This extension can be carried out before or after the reflection activity above.

When students have completed the reading guide, teachers should allow time to process feelings and new learning as this activity might raise significant emotional responses from students due to the nature of the content.

Teachers should be prepared to channel student perspectives and viewpoints into productive conversations about the role of the United States in the world, and also be ready to manage critical conversations about different interpretations of the conduct of the United States Armed Forces during times of conflict.

Lesson 3

Looking for Patterns of War Crimes

Objective: Apply knowledge to real world examples

Civilian Infrastructure

📍 School in Kharkiv, Ukraine 3/11/22



Preparation and set up

Students will need access to the Rome Statute handout and their work from Lesson 2 for this lesson. Please preview the video linked below before using it as there are images and content that may be upsetting to some students. As with this whole mini-unit, use your best judgment and prepare your students for the emotional weight of the content. If you choose not to use the video, have students read over the text on the main webpage (link below) in order to learn about the mission and methods of The Reckoning Project.

Opening

① Begin the lesson by having students watch the video at this link (next to the *What We Do* caption): <https://www.thereckoningproject.com/>. Explain that they should be watching the video in order to understand the mission and methods of a nongovernmental organization called *The Reckoning Project*.

After watching the video, ask students to turn and talk to summarize the mission of the Reckoning Project in their own words. Then on your screen or board, write or project the phrase *Justice delayed is justice denied*. Have students turn and talk about what this means to them and then lead a whole class discussion around this motto and have students talk about what they think this has to do with the war in Ukraine.

Tell the students they may have noticed an important word, **impunity**, during the video. Write or project the word **impunity** on your board or screen. Ask them if anybody knows the meaning of the word and have students share their best guesses or definitions. Explain to students that when they see a new word like this they can use something called morphemic analysis to figure out what it means. Morphemic analysis is the process of breaking down a word into its component parts. Write **puni** on your board and ask students what word this makes them think of. Probe student thinking and give them clues as needed until someone says punish or punishment or punitive. Then write **impossibility** and **immobility** on the board and ask students what they think **im** means in these words. Without giving them the answer, probe student thinking and help them see that **im** in both words means the absence or lack of something, a lack of possibility or a lack of mobility. Ask them to put that together with punishment in the word **impunity** and help them reach the conclusion that impunity means an absence or lack of punishment. Explain that this is an incredibly important concept that they will come back to later.

Guided Inquiry

② Now explain to the students that they will be using resources (such as an interactive map) that have been developed by a team of researchers at the University of Michigan in collaboration with The Reckoning Project. Using case reports and interactive maps, they will try to determine whether or not there are clear patterns of war crimes in Ukraine*.

Pass out the *Lesson 3 Student Handout - Looking for patterns of war crimes*.

Direct students to work their way through prompts 1 and 2. When most students have completed these two activities, check in with the whole class and have different groups share their ideas. Make sure they understand that the red dots represent regional clusters of incidents of war crimes and that the number on the red dot represents the number of documented incidents in this area at a given time.

**Please encourage the students to take a look at the disclaimer (upper left) to ensure that they don't perceive the map as the comprehensive coverage of war crimes in Ukraine. There is also a note about that on The Reckoning Project @ WCEE website in the FAQ section.*

Independent Practice

③ Working in small groups, have the students move on to the next section of the handout and select 4 red circles (sets of specific incidents) to analyze. They should open each set of incidents by clicking on the red circle and then review the types of incidents reported and look for patterns. They need to fill out the table to keep track of their findings.

Next, as directed in the handout, they should compare across the four red circles they have selected and answer the questions about similarities and differences. As needed, pull the class together for whole class check-ins in which different groups share their thinking and give each other feedback.

④ Moving through the handout, they should next open and analyze the troop movement map. After looking at general patterns, they will click on the red circle in the region of Donetsk that has 20 incidents, and then click on number 13 (see the screenshots below). As directed, they should work collaboratively to summarize what happened in their own words and then answer the questions provided. Looking at the specific crime, they should revisit the Rome Statute and their thinking from lesson two and identify what specific war crime this incident represents.

Sharing and Reflection

⑤ Have students work in small groups to discuss why war crimes should be prosecuted and ask them to talk about what would happen if these crimes are not investigated and prosecuted. What has history taught us about the dangers of impunity? After each group has had time to talk, ask each group to share some reflections with the whole class and then ask students to support, extend, or challenge ideas shared by other groups.

Assessment

There are multiple opportunities to assess student learning and thinking during this lesson. As always, teachers can engage in formative assessment by probing student thinking with open-ended questions, listening carefully to group discussions and work conversations, and pressing students to explain their thinking behind certain answers. The written responses to handout questions can be collected and graded for completion and thoughtfulness as well.

Lesson 4

Incident Case Studies

Objective: Learn how to work with archival materials

Ukraine Testifies



Preparation and set up

Please preview the incident reports from the Reckoning Project before using them as there is content that may be upsetting to some students. As with this whole mini-unit, use your best judgment and prepare your students for the emotional weight of the content.

In this lesson, students will focus on one particular incident report. Teachers will have to decide whether or not to assign specific incidents to specific groups or allow students to choose which incident to focus on. Incident reports will need to be copied and provided to student groups accordingly.

Remind students that these incident reports represent real events and real people and allow time to process this information as needed.

Opening

① Explain to the students that they are now going to focus on one particular war crime incident. They are going to prepare a summary of the incident, analyze the evidence, and decide what type of war crime has been committed.

Tell them that investigating war crimes is a very complex and emotionally demanding process. Journalists and lawyers alike have to take into account their own emotional well-being as well as the safety and security of their witnesses. Have students stop and jot, then turn and talk, in response to the following prompt: “How do you think investigators looking into serious war crimes take care of themselves while also protecting their witnesses?”

After students have had time to write and discuss in pairs, ask different students to share their thoughts and engage the class in a whole group conversation around the prompt. Then ask students to consider the emotional impact of investigating war crimes and ask them to discuss how emotions might create bias, and how investigators might manage emotional responses to minimize bias.

Guided Inquiry

② Next, pass out *Student Handout 4, Incident Exploration*, and review the layout of the first graphic organizer with students. Then, provide them with access to their assigned incident report. Explain that the goal of the graphic organizer is for them to summarize the incident report in their own words.

Make sure that students understand that the graphic organizer requires to engage in a basic *who, what, where, when, and how* analysis of the event. Give them time to work in their groups and move through the room checking in with each group to make sure they understand the task and are staying focused. If needed, pull the class back together for whole group check-ins or clarifications of instructions.

When groups have completed the first graphic organizer, pull the class together for a check-in and ask each group to briefly summarize their incident for the class.

Independent Practice

③ Now review the instructions for the War Crimes Review Checklist and the evidence-based claim graphic organizer that follows. Explain that they will have to identify 1 to 3 war crimes they think took place during this incident and provide a rationale for their thinking. They will also make a recommendation for which crimes they think will be most relevant for prosecutors based on available evidence.

As before, give them time to work in their groups and move through the room checking in with each group to make sure they understand the task and are staying focused. If needed, pull the class back together for whole group check-ins or clarifications of instructions.

When groups have completed this second graphic organizer, pull the class together for a check-in and ask each group to briefly summarize their incident again and describe what war crime(s) they think it represents.

Sharing and Reflection

④ To close out this lesson, ask students to reflect on the incident they learned about using Head, Heart, Conscience again (below). This can be done as a silent stop and jot, as an exit pass that you collect, or even as a turn-and-talk or small group conversation. However you carry it out, be sure to build in time for whole group sharing.

Head, Heart, Conscience Reflection Respond to **one** prompt from each section.

Head

- What new facts or information did you learn about war crimes by focusing on a particular incident?
- What additional information would you like to have to help you better understand this particular incident?

Heart

- What emotions does this topic bring up for you?
- Are there particular details that stand out to you? If so, why?

Conscience

- What questions about fairness or justice does this topic raise for you?
- How do you think real people were impacted by this incident? Are there people who should be held accountable? If so, how?

Assessment

There are multiple opportunities to assess student learning and thinking during this lesson. As always, teachers can engage in formative assessment by probing student thinking with open-ended questions, listening carefully to group discussions and work conversations, and pressing students to explain their thinking behind certain answers. The graphic organizers can be collected and graded for completion and accuracy as well.

Appendix I

Vicarious Trauma Training

This training is recommended **before** student engagement with materials presented in “The Reckoning Project @ WCEE: Investigating War Crimes in Ukraine.”

The content included in this teaching unit (such as discussions of war crimes and mentions of graphic violence) might be distressing for students. Using this training, educators can prepare their students for work with sensitive materials.

Format: 1-1.5 hours workshop

Includes:

- PowerPoint Presentation
- Teacher’s Guide
- Case Study Handouts
- Optional Readings

PowerPoint Presentation and Optional Readings are included in the downloadable High School Teaching Materials package (free of charge):

www.myumi.ch/bE539



Vicarious Trauma Training Teacher's Guide

Training Overview

Title: Navigating Vicarious Trauma

Duration: ~1-1.5 hours

Audience: high school / college students

Objective: Educate students about “vicarious trauma,” its impact, and remediating strategies.

Learning Goals

- Understand vicarious trauma and its causes.
- Identify signs of vicarious trauma and its potential impact on an individual’s analytical judgment and mental health.
- Learn coping strategies and identify support resources.

Materials Needed

- Projector and screen
- Printed case study handouts
- Safe space for discussions

Before You Start

- Review this guide and the attached presentation
 - Even though the readings we provide are marked as Optional, we recommend reviewing them before the training.
- Prepare the discussion space
 - Arrange for a quiet classroom where students can feel safe and won’t be distracted.
- Be aware:
 - Make note of potentially sensitive and triggering topics before the training session.
 - Eliminate case studies from student activities if you or students feel uncomfortable with them.
 - Provide space for students to remove themselves from the discussion at any point.
 - Prepare to address emotional responses with calm and care.
 - Present information in a way that minimizes the risk of triggering situations, e.g., refrain from overly detailed descriptions of violence and suffering.

① Introduction

- Welcome the students.
- Why are we here?
 - Ask students if they have ideas about “vicarious trauma.”
 - Mention the sensitive nature of the materials students will be engaging with.
- Introduce the topic and provide an overview of the training (*Contents* slide).

② Definition and Causes

- What is **trauma**?
 - Encourage students to come up with their own definition of trauma.
 - Present the definition of trauma:
 - › Trauma: Experience(s) that cause intense physical and/or psychological stress reactions.
 - › Comes from the Greek word trauma (τραύμα), which means “wound”
 - › Can refer to a single event, multiple events, or a set of circumstances experienced as harmful and threatening, and has a lasting impact on physical, social, emotional, and/or spiritual well-being.
- What is **vicarious trauma**?
 - What does the adjective “vicarious” mean?
 - › “experienced as a result of watching, listening to, or reading about the activities of other people, rather than by doing the activities yourself.”
 - › “secondary” as a possible synonym for “vicarious.”
 - Considering these definitions, what could “vicarious trauma” mean?
 - › Vicarious trauma can be defined as a **gradual emotional impact** that can occur when someone connects deeply with traumatized individuals and their experiences, especially when they feel a strong responsibility to help survivors.
 - › This may lead to painful shifts in how the individual views the world, their sense of hope, their feelings of safety, or shifts in their relationships with others.
- **Who is at risk** of vicarious trauma?

Anyone who works with sensitive topics or deals with traumatic material, even if they’re not directly involved in the traumatic event or working with a victim/witness directly.
- What are the potential **causes & risk factors of vicarious trauma**?
 - Past traumatic experiences.
 - › Engaging with sensitive materials might remind you of something painful in your past.
 - Feeling isolated at school, work, or home.
 - › Less isolated = lower risk.

-
- Avoiding emotions.
 - › Difficulty sharing feelings.
 - Level of training, support, and guidance.
 - › How well-prepared you are to work with sensitive materials.
 - › Not having the opportunity to talk about the sensitive content with teacher/advisor.
 - › Constantly working with sensitive content without any breaks.
 - Cultural expectations and societal support.
 - › What your community and society at-large think about the events/people that you are affected by.
-
- **Brief Pause** for questions (2-3 questions; direct the rest for after the presentation).
 - Use relatable examples (e.g., watching news about violent incidents, “doomscrolling” on social media, listening to friends’ struggles).

③ Signs and Symptoms

- Engage students in a discussion about **emotional, physical, and behavioral signs** of vicarious trauma.
 - Psychological symptoms (what happens in your **mind**):
 - › Feeling very angry, sad, or upset about what happened to the victim.
 - › Feeling guilty or ashamed for not being able to help.
 - › Constantly thinking about the victim outside of the situation.
 - › Relating to the victim’s experience, leading to worrying and/or nightmares.
 - › Feeling hopeless and helpless.
 - › Always being on edge or alert.
 - › Trying to avoid or distance yourself from sensitive materials or your feelings.
 - Physical symptoms (what happens with your **body**):
 - › Feeling really tired or having trouble sleeping.
 - › Experiencing aches and pains or getting sick more often.
 - › Finding it hard to focus or stay on task.
 - › Struggling to handle your emotions (crying a lot, feeling angry, or getting annoyed easily).
 - › Turning to unhealthy habits or behaviors to cope.

④ Distinguishing Vicarious Trauma

Mention that many other feelings and conditions might have effects similar to vicarious trauma—such as feeling down, burned out, tired, worried, depressed, or anxious. What is the difference between compassion fatigue, burnout, and vicarious trauma? Compare the definitions in the table. Discuss the differences.

Compassion Fatigue	Burnout	PTSD	Vicarious Trauma
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• direct contact• feeling worn out emotionally and physically• happens when the person can't recharge and take care of themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• feeling really tired, both physically and emotionally• working too much• caused by being unhappy at school/work and/or feeling overwhelmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• an ongoing mental health condition after a shocking event—whether you go through it or learn about it	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• hearing about someone else's trauma• a major change in how you see the world• your basic beliefs about the world are changed or affected

Make sure to emphasize that PTSD is a serious mental health condition that should be diagnosed and treated with the help of a mental health professional.

⑤ Case Study

- Explore **three cases**:
 - Be aware of the trigger warning about heavy topics (*Case Study* slide).
 - Share the case study handouts (P. 41) in order (Taylor, Alma, Tim).
 - If appropriate, have volunteers read each case out loud.
 - After each case, the slides offer a possible explanation and solution.
- If time permits, offer students to reflect on **their own experiences** in a safe and supportive manner.

Taylor

- Working so much caused Taylor to be severely **burned out**.
- All work and no rest have contributed to their feeling unmotivated and exhausted. This may also be contributing to procrastination—delaying or putting off doing tasks that need to be finished.

-
- **Set a Work Schedule:** Taylor should create a balanced schedule that includes specific times for research, schoolwork, and college applications. They could also reduce the hours they dedicate to the research project. This can help them manage their time better and avoid last-minute stress.
 - **Prioritize Tasks:** They can make a list of their responsibilities and prioritize what needs to be done first. Focusing on one task at a time can make everything feel more manageable.
 - **Take Breaks:** Taylor should schedule regular breaks during their study sessions. Short breaks can help recharge and improve focus.
 - **Practice Self-Care:** Engaging in activities they enjoy, like exercising, spending time with friends, or pursuing hobbies, can help relieve stress and recharge.
 - **Sleep Well:** Prioritizing good sleep is crucial. Taylor should aim for a consistent sleep schedule to help them feel more alert during the day.
 - **Stay Organized:** Using planners or digital tools to keep track of deadlines and assignments can help feel more in control.
 - **Focus on Progress, Not Perfection:** Taylor should remind themselves that it's okay to make mistakes and that progress is more important than perfection.

Alma

- Most likely, Alma is experiencing **compassion fatigue**. She was very selfless about listening to the victims—to the point where she forgot about her own well-being.
- **However!** It's also possible that Alma is traumatized by engaging with the secondary material, especially since she was bullied in the past herself. Therefore, it might also be vicarious trauma.
- **Take Breaks:** Alma should schedule regular breaks from the project to recharge her emotional energy. Even short breaks can help her feel refreshed.
- **Set Boundaries:** Alma should talk to the teacher in charge and ask to reduce the workload or redistribute it to the other people involved. She can also set limits on how many interviews she conducts each week to avoid feeling overwhelmed by the stories.
- **Talk to Someone:** Sharing her feelings with her project partner, a friend, or a counselor can help her process her emotions and gain perspective.
- **Practice Self-Care:** Engaging in activities she enjoys, like hobbies, exercise, or spending time with friends, can help her relax and relieve stress.
- **Reflect on Her Feelings:** Alma should take time to reflect on her emotional responses. Journaling about her feelings can help her understand what she's going through.

-
- **Mindfulness Techniques:** Practicing mindfulness or meditation can help Alma center herself and reduce stress. There are many apps available to guide her.
 - **Focus on the Meaning:** Reminding herself of the positive impact of her project and how it can help others can help her stay motivated and engaged.
 - **Limit Exposure to Distressing Content:** While reading about bullying can be helpful, Alma should be mindful of how much distressing material she consumes outside her project

Tim

- Tim's situation is a classic example of **vicarious trauma**.
- He engaged with the traumatic materials a lot, which resulted in a shift in his worldview and constant worrying.
- **Set Boundaries:** Tim can cut back on how much time he spends reading about firearm violence on social media and focus more on taking care of himself.
- **Talk It Out:** He should talk to someone he trusts, like a friend, family member, or counselor, about how he's feeling. Sharing his worries can make him feel better.
- **Practice Self-Care:** Doing things he enjoys, like exercising, reading, or spending time outside, can help him relax and recharge.
- **Mindfulness Techniques:** Tim can try mindfulness or meditation to calm his mind and reduce anxiety. There are apps and online resources that can help him with this.
- **Focus on the Meaning:** He should remind himself of the good things he's doing with his work and the positive things happening in the world to help balance his feelings of guilt and helplessness.
- **Set a Routine:** Keeping a regular sleep schedule and healthy habits can improve how he feels and help him sleep better.
- **Limit News Intake:** Instead of always checking X/Twitter for updates, Tim could choose specific times to catch up on the news, which might help reduce his anxiety.
- **Support for His Sister:** Instead of texting his sister every day, Tim could check in less often to give her some space while still showing he cares.

⑥ Coping Strategies

- Ask the students how they would **interpret** the following **quote**:
 - *“Comprehending the senselessness of profound cruelty is existentially traumatic. Awareness of the pervasiveness and prevalence of abuse, combined with looking into the abyss and seeing the unbearable **ordinariness** of those who perpetrate atrocities, exposes the world as dangerous and cruel without reason” (Moran and Asquith 2020).*
- **Make an emphasis:** when working with war crime materials, it can be really upsetting to see how cruel people can be. When we realize that abuse happens all the time and see that ordinary people can do terrible things, it makes the world feel unfair and scary.
 - Highlight that this is precisely why it’s **important to step away** from the readings and war crime news.
- **Ask your students:** Is vicarious trauma a sign of weakness?
 - **No.** It’s a normal response to doing research on, or learning about, traumatic experiences.
 - We are in control when we **know how to deal with it.**
- Discuss coping strategies:
 - Validate your own experience: what you are doing is difficult and **experiencing emotions is normal.**
 - › It is also normal not to experience strong emotions. What is key is to be aware of one’s feelings when engaging with sensitive materials.
 - Avoid working on sensitive materials in your bedroom, so that your room remains a safe space when you can recharge. Work in the library, a café, or other quiet space.
 - Dedicate specific days/hours to your study and work; make it a scheduled activity.
 - Include a mandatory break between ending one task and beginning another study activity.
 - Contact your teacher or counselor to discuss your feelings and thoughts.
 - Limit your daily exposure to news and social media.
 - If you are in therapy, include a discussion of your study and work into your therapy routine (esp. for triggers).
 - Take a **mindfulness break** if you are feeling overwhelmed in the process.
- Talk more about **mindfulness.**
 - **Goal:** make yourself aware of your surroundings and your own physical presence.
 - Become aware of your **surroundings:**
 - › Look out of your window and observe the surroundings.
 - › Count certain objects outside (cars, passersby, trees, dogs, etc.).
 - › Take a brisk walk outside.

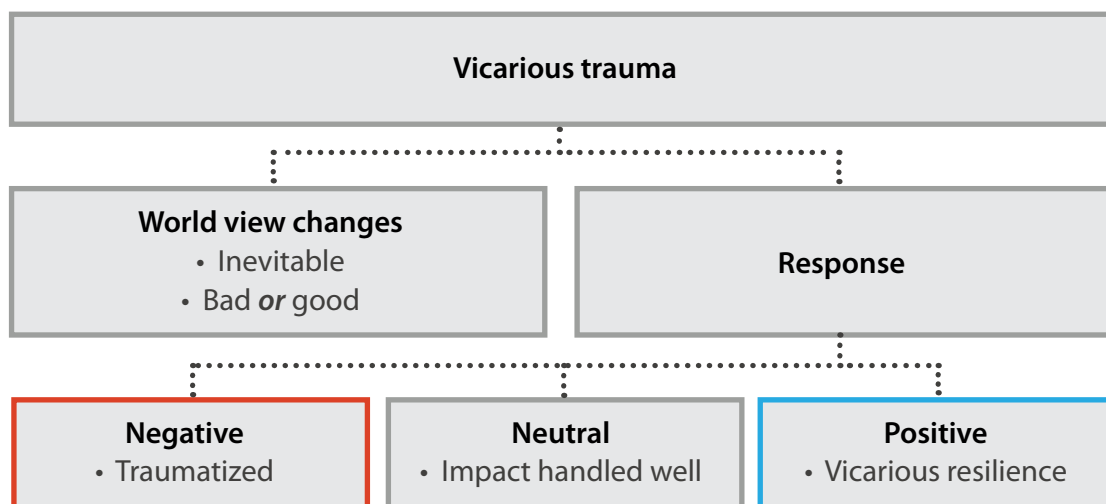
- **“I am here!”** - observe your physical body:
 - › 4-6-8 breathing exercise: Inhale for 4 sec, hold for 6 sec, exhale for 8 sec.
 - › Brief physical activity (squats, sit-ups, stretching).
 - › Eye exercise (*active link*).
 - › Tea, coffee, or snack break.
 - › Focus on the steps of preparing the drink/snack.
 - › Wash the dishes.
 - › Hug your pet!
- While talking about mindfulness, you can have students follow along by actually **doing the exercises**—looking out of the window, counting objects, eye exercise, 4-6-8, etc.

⑦ Vicarious Resilience

- Is vicarious trauma always bad?
 - **No.** Sometimes it can result in becoming stronger and developing **vicarious resilience!**

(At the Vicarious Trauma Response model slide):

- Speak about how one thing from vicarious trauma is inevitable—a **worldview change**. It can be negative or positive.
 - One thing that we can control is **how we respond**.
 - › If we ignore our feelings and thoughts, we can suffer from vicarious trauma, and it may elicit **negative** responses.
 - › If we get enough rest and balance our work reasonably well, we can have a **neutral** outcome, i.e., no vicarious trauma.
 - › If we are really good about taking care of ourselves, learning, and reflecting, we can get a **positive** outcome and become resilient!



-
- Effects may include:
 - On the diagram, I'd replace "traumatized" with "vicarious trauma"
 - Feeling more grateful.
 - Growing in self-awareness.
 - Learning new skills that help both at school and in personal life.
 - Finding a sense of meaning.
 - Future ability to endure difficult topics.
 - Vicarious resilience can be built through **reflection** (*thinking about what you are doing and talking about it*) and **awareness** (*knowing what vicarious trauma is and how to deal with it*).

⑧ Conclusion

- Highlight what students learned.
- Allow space for questions, sharing personal experiences, and discussion.

Follow-Up Activities (*after the unit start*)

- **Reflection Journals:** Encourage students to keep a journal to reflect on their feelings and coping strategies.
- **Support Groups:** Organize voluntary support sessions where students can share experiences in a safe space.
- **Resource Corner:** Create a bulletin board or online space with mental health resources.

Optional Readings

- PDFs are included in the package.
- Recommended for teacher use before the start of this training and Lessons 3-4 of The Reckoning Project @ WCEE Teaching Materials.
- These readings can also be assigned to advanced students ahead of the training
 - works well for students with previous research/research paper analysis experience, students enrolled in AP Psychology, etc.

Moran, R. J., & Asquith, N. L. (2020). Understanding the vicarious trauma and emotional labour of criminological research. *Methodological Innovations*, 13(2), 2059799120926085.

Pearlman, L. A., & McKay, L. (2008). Understanding and addressing vicarious trauma. Headington Institute.

Sexual Violence Research Initiative. (2007). Vicarious trauma: Understanding and managing the impact of doing research on sensitive topics. Pretoria, South Africa: Global Forum for Health Research Pretoria. Retrieved from <http://www.svri.org/researcherhandout.pdf>.

Williamson, E., Gregory, A., Abrahams, H., Aghtaie, N., Walker, S. J., & Hester, M. (2020). Secondary trauma: Emotional safety in sensitive research. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 18, 55-70.

Vicarious Trauma Training

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Case 1 — Taylor



Taylor, a senior at Summit Ridge High, just got an amazing chance to become a research assistant for a professor at the University of Michigan. They couldn't pass it up! Since the school year started, Taylor has been working on analyzing survey data from Holocaust victims. They originally planned to work 8-10 hours a week, but because the project is time-sensitive and Taylor is really interested in it, they've been putting in 15-20 hours a week on top of their school work.

Lately, Taylor has been feeling really tired and often dozes off in class. They are also feeling unmotivated and keep putting off their assignments, which means they end up working late at night right before they assignments are due. Taylor knows that they also have to work on their college applications, but they simply can't find the time or the desire to start.

Case 2 — Alma

Alma, a junior at Riverwood High, has been working for the school newspaper since her freshman year. Together with her journalism teacher, she launched a new project on bullying prevention. The project, which will be published as a series in the newspaper, includes an art exhibit as well as confidential interviews with the victims of bullying.

Over the past two months, Alma and her project partner have talked to 17 students. Alma has always been a very compassionate person and an active listener, which really helped with conducting the interviews. The victims have been very open with Alma. They have been sharing a lot of sad and disturbing experiences that they went through. Alma had no clue that this was this prevalent at their school. Sure, she was also a target of some bullying a couple of years ago, but she didn't have a clue that it was *that* bad. To make her writing and the understanding of the subject better, she has been reading more about bullying at school online.

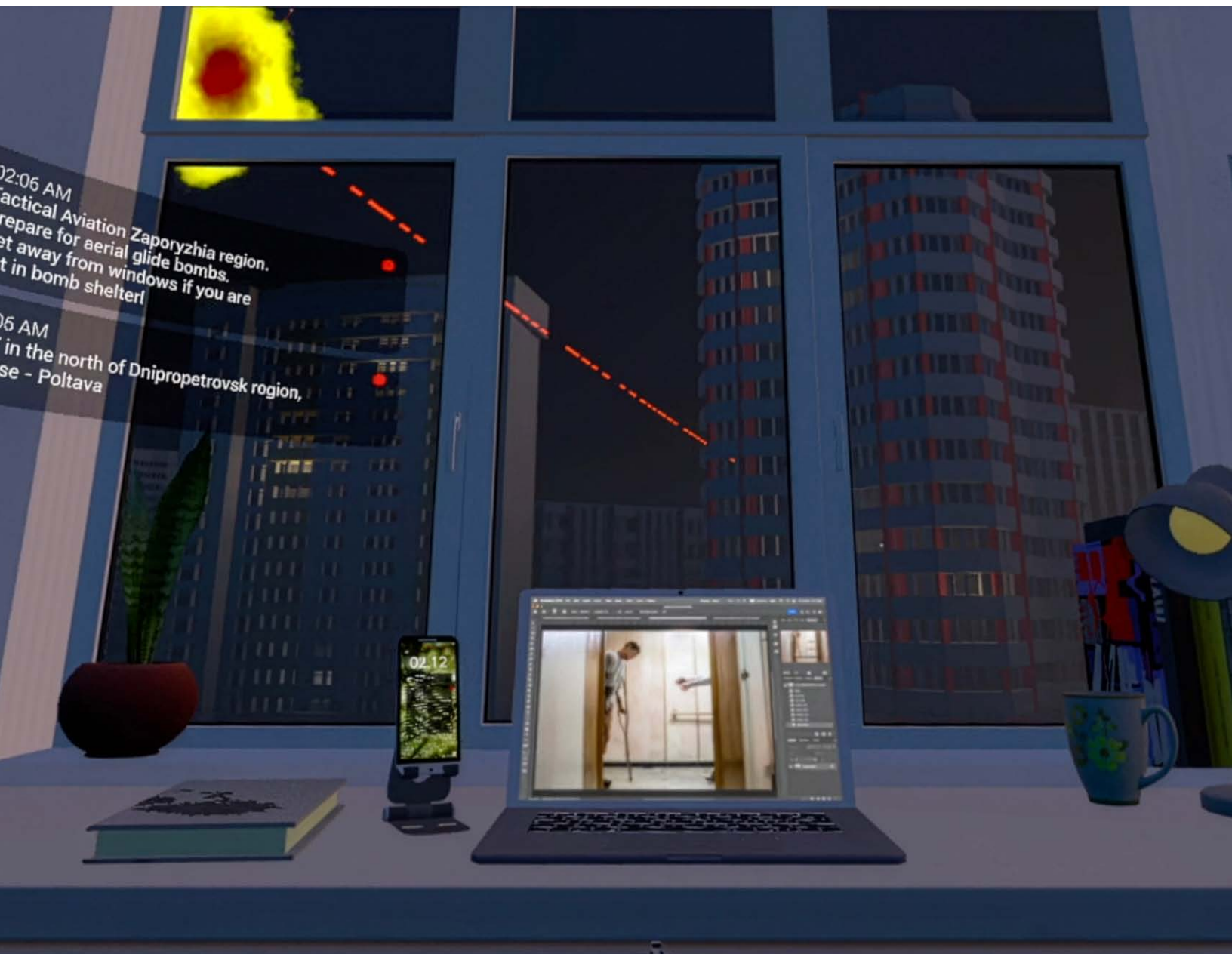
However, last week her project partner noted that Alma is not as warm and open towards the victims as she was before. The colleague might be right—Alma noticed that the stories do not touch her as deeply anymore. She often feels like she is just mechanically recording the information rather than become involved, which really affects her writing. She often feels annoyed with the interviewees' emotional reactions, and this fact bothers her. Alma also feels quite irritable lately—this morning, Alma snapped at her mom for asking whether she wants to be picked up from school today.



Appendix II

Virtual Reality Learning Activity Guide

“Is the War Close?”





Activity Guide Developed By

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Activity and Discussion Guide for a Virtual Reality Experience

VR Overview

This approximately 10-minute Virtual Reality (VR) experience brings the user to civilian areas in Ukraine – specifically Kyiv – bombed by the Russian military. It begins with some introductory text that provides context for the participant and then introduces the central question of the experience, *Is the war close?* This question is posed by the experience’s narrator, a young Ukrainian girl, and directed to her father. After the introduction, you explore a bedroom with two windows. There are everyday objects in the room; a bed, children’s art, a laptop computer, a yoga mat. Tall buildings are visible through the window. The narrator informs the participant that people in Ukraine receive text alerts when a bombing in their area is imminent, and then text messages begin to appear alerting the viewer that missile and drone attacks are soon to commence. Through the windows you can see light flashes from explosions and hear the sounds of missiles and drones hitting the city.

As you move and look around the room during and after the attack, you see evidence of the damage, like a picture on a wall that gets displaced, or damage to nearby buildings that you can see through the window. A constant stream of alerts continues from the phone that provide information on the types of weaponry being used, likely points of origin, and where attacks might hit. You get a sense of what it’s like to live through an attack like this and you consider the choices that people have: to go to a bomb shelter, to continue as normal, to sleep on the floor in a room with no windows, and so forth. When the attack is over you are left to survey the damage, and the narrator provides more information about the scale and scope of these attacks; and life continues amidst the violence of this war.

This VR experience is based on real events and first-person accounts, which have been combined and edited for length and clarity. The audio of drones, missiles, and air defenses was recorded during actual Russian attacks on Kyiv and has been edited and spatialized. The question, *“Is the war close?”* was asked by the 10-year-old daughter of the writer and director of this project as he carried her in his arms during a large Russian attack on Kyiv.

Technical information

This VR Experience was designed and tested on head-mounted display (HMD) hardware including the Meta Quest 3 and Meta Quest Pro. It can be viewed on any standalone VR HMD that can install a standalone apk (Android Package) file. This application does not require the internet, although many new models of HMDs do for setup. Follow the directions of your VR headset’s manufacturer to install an apk through developer mode, or download *Is the War Close?* from select app stores.

You can download the apk file and install it on your headset via Sidequest - https://etg-web.miserver.it.umich.edu/apk/vr_ukraine.apk

Please pair the application with quality over-the-ear headphones capable of stereo audio. VR HMDs accommodate both bluetooth and direct wired connection, though the development team recommends a wired connection for simplicity and reliability. The benefit is twofold. First, there is improved spatial audio immersion. Second, due to the traumatizing and loud content of the application, it is best to enclose the audio in headphones to prevent passersby from hearing the explosions.

VR Accessibility Recommendations

VR experiences risk causing simulation sickness, dizziness and nausea due to the simulation’s perspective, and other sensory output misaligning with the user’s expectations. *Is the War Close?* mitigates the risk of simulation sickness by strictly following the user’s HMD’s perspective and position. There is no other movement. To limit eye strain, virtual reality sessions are not recommended to exceed twenty minutes. This ten minute long experience is comfortable for a user to run twice with or without a break.

Is the War Close? can be experienced seated or standing. Users can walk around as wide as the user-defined, safe, play area allows.

This application was designed for users ages 13+ with no VR experience. It requires no controls on behalf of the player. Therefore, facilitators, such as teachers in classrooms, do not need to hand off controllers. As of V1.01, there are no controls except the A/X buttons which restart the game.

There are recorded video versions, and an in-development 360 video version, suited for individuals who experience extreme simulation sickness, do not have stereoscopic vision, cannot wear HMDs, and/or cannot experience the simulation for any other reason.

Preparing and Facilitating a Virtual Reality Demonstration

Safety & Sanitation

Before all VR sessions, clean the plastic components of the HMD with an alcohol wipe. Do not touch alcohol wipes to the lenses. Use standard lens cleaning rags for the lens. Masks can be worn in an HMD to the extent of a user's tolerance, but may cause a cholestropic feeling.

Meta headsets allow the configuration of a safe play area, or "guardian." The Guardian is a boundary that appears in the headset when the user nears the edge of a safe area. Follow the HMD safety directions to suit the demonstration's environment. The game can be experienced fully with a stationary boundary. Roomscale boundaries or sessions without a boundary allow for more physical exploration, and therefore greater flexibility when exploring the main room of *Is the War Close?*

Consent and Assistance

Users in VR cannot see the assistant. **It is imperative to verbally ask and receive consent before touching any users entering, inside, or exiting Virtual Reality.** Players often need help moving their fingers to the correct buttons, or having their HMD dials and straps adjusted for the best fit, clarity, and comfort. Before assisting anyone with fit or controls, ask for consent. Then, clearly narrate what you are going to touch. For example, "Can I touch your right hand to move your thumb to the correct button?" Also, warn all users before entering the simulation that the facilitator may need to place their hands on the player's elbows, hands, or shoulders to prevent them from stepping out of the safe play area or walking into objects. The facilitator is ultimately in charge of the player's safety and should watch for other hazards in the real world.

Troubleshooting Blind

Facilitators will also be unable to see what users are seeing. To understand where they are in the application, ask "What do you see?" Listen for responses that describe any part of *Is the War Close?*, and ask follow up questions to understand your user's progress in the simulation. Many individuals reply to the opening slides of *Is the War Close?* as "white text," "warning," or simply say "yes" and "it started." In some cases, headset software may recognize a new user, attempt to update, or request a change to the safety boundary. In these cases, the user may describe a pop up window. It is recommended to take the headset back for a moment to close these menus, unless the user is an experienced VR player who can use controllers with comfort. Be aware that users often misclick buttons when taking controllers, so this application does not require the

player to handle them at all. Facilitators, instructors, and assistants can hold the controllers and restart the app to the beginning by pressing A/X twice once the user is comfortably situated.

The development team advises all teaching staff, assistants, and facilitators to try the application at least once, and also practice onboarding a peer before beginning their demonstration.

Fit

While HMDS from different manufacturers vary in bulk, weight, and features like battery packs or occipital bone support, there are general guidelines to help fit a diverse group of users.

First, begin by using the headset dial or straps to loosen the headset to its widest dimensions. Individuals with glasses often need to put on the headset eyes-first, and move until their glasses are secure within the visor. Individuals without glasses often put the headset on like a baseball-cap. Either way, once it is comfortably around the user's head, and the visor is seated to the user's eyes, use the dial and straps to tighten the headset as snug as possible. The majority of the weight should rest on the user's forehead and the back of their head, not their cheeks and nose.

Head-Mounted displays can be difficult to fit for individuals with large glasses frames, hats, weaves and wigs, and other head accessories. Some headsets have removable sides for large glasses. Hijabs and head wraps fit well under headsets, but may require assistance to secure to the user while the headsets are equipped. As usual, ask for consent. Most other accessories fit within HMDs.

Facilitating a VR Session

Before beginning, ask the user of their experience with virtual reality. Some individuals who have never experienced it may have concerns about controls, safety, or comfort. Inform them that you may need to touch them to help them in or out of the headset and gain verbal consent.

- First, facilitators should begin *Is the War Close?* at full volume in the headset.
- Then, help the user into their headset following the guidance in the Fit section above.
 - Do not give the users the controllers.
 - In demonstrations with multiple headsets, our development team recommends color-coding controllers and headset pairings to prevent mixing up equipment.
- Once the user is in the headset comfortably, give headphones to the user. Instead of putting them on for the user, which often can be uncomfortable — nudge the headphones into the player's hands, and inform them that there are headphones for them to grab and put on over the headset. Supply help as needed and requested.

-
- Once the user is within the HMD, press A/X on the controller once. Wait one second, then press it again (two total). This will restart the simulation.
 - Ask the user what they see. If they verbally illustrate seeing the Title, “Is the War Close?” and the turnaround graphic, “Please turnaround,” then the experience has begun.
 - **Tell them the experience has begun, lasts ten minutes, and ends when they reach the Credits.**
 - Observe. While the user is in the simulation, facilitators can onboard the next user. There should always be an assistant or facilitator “spotting” users in Virtual Reality to ensure they do not encounter any dangers or exceed the play area, or to intervene if there are bugs or extreme emotional reactions.
 - After about ten minutes, facilitators and assistants can usually identify that a user has finished the experience when they reach for their headphones and headset. Take the equipment as the user removes it in the way that is most comfortable to them. They may be disoriented or emotional. Take care, be calm, and move on to the study material.

In our pilot workshops of *Is the War Close?* at the University of Michigan Visualization Studio and 64th Ann Arbor Film Festival, we received consistent feedback that the application is worth experiencing twice. The first time provides a raw emotional reaction, and the second time (ideally after some discussion) allows players to absorb the personal details of the VR room once they are no longer overwhelmed by the destruction outside. After all, it has become normal to Ukrainians. How many times would this experience take to feel normal?

Learning Activity Overview

This activity guide is meant to accompany the virtual reality experience and connect it to the larger curricular project, The Reckoning Project @ WCEE: Investigating War Crimes in Ukraine. The VR activity can be implemented as a part of this curricular unit as an extension of Lesson 3 or 4, or as an additional culminating project. It can also be used to complement other curricula related to the war between Ukraine and Russia. It is important that students have some background knowledge and context for this experience, so we do not recommend using it in isolation without other learning opportunities related to this war.

These activities can take between 1 to 3 standard class periods (55 to 60 minutes) depending upon different factors like numbers of students and headsets, and activity options selected.

In these activities:

- Students will have the opportunity to take on different roles through which they explore the impact of Russian bombardments on the civilian population of Ukraine, considering how these attacks impact people’s lives.
- Students will be engaged in analyzing the scale and scope of the bombing and what it suggests about the intentions of Russia and how that connects to the question of whether these attacks are war crimes.
- Students are also guided to think about how the Ukrainian people are resilient and resourceful as they continue with their daily lives despite this violence.
- Finally, students will also have the opportunity to discuss how art and storytelling can play a key role in helping people process and understand – and educate others- about events such as these.

The design of these materials was informed by a framework developed by the New York Times lesson plan team for their virtual reality learning experiences.

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/29/learning/lesson-plans/virtual-reality-curriculum-guide-experience-immersion-and-excursion-in-the-classroom.html>

Before engaging students in these activities, please review the Safety Guidelines, the recommendations for Responsive Teaching About Human Rights Abuses, and the Vicarious Trauma training found in the Appendix of The Reckoning Project @ WCEE Teaching Guide (page 31). Take the appropriate steps needed to create a safe and productive learning experience for your students!

Safety Guidelines for Virtual Reality Learning

① Teacher Preparation

- **Check Equipment:** Inspect headsets and any other components for damage before each use.
- **Sanitize Devices:** Clean shared VR equipment as needed (if not cleaned after last use) to prevent the spread of germs.
- **Clear Physical Space:** Ensure there’s enough room for each student (about a 6-foot radius) to safely move without bumping into objects or people.

② Student Training

- **Explain Controls:** Teach students how to use the VR devices before handing them out.
- **Safety Briefing:** Explain the importance of staying within the designated area and not moving too quickly.
- **Team Roles:** Students will be working in pairs, so remind them that the student without the headset should help keep their partner safe.

③ Health & Comfort

- **Monitor Usage Time:** Limit sessions to 15–20 minutes at a time to reduce eye fatigue and motion sickness.
- **Look for Discomfort:** Watch for signs of dizziness, nausea, or distress. Also watch for signs of emotional stress due to content. Allow students to pause or stop at any time.
- **Adjust Fit:** Make sure headsets are properly adjusted for each student to maximize comfort and viewing experience.

④ Supervision

- **Active Supervision:** Always have an adult present to supervise and assist as needed.
- **Emergency Readiness:** Have a basic first aid kit nearby and know the school's response procedures.

⑤ Accessible Participation

- **Accommodate Needs:** Provide options for students who may not feel comfortable using VR (such as alternative assignments or spectating).
- **Communicate Consent:** Ensure students and parents are aware of VR activities (as well as content) and know that they have the opportunity to opt out.

⑥ Safe Interaction

- **No Horseplay:** Make clear that running, pushing, or “virtual pranking” is not allowed.
- **Stay in Assigned Area:** Remind students to always remain in their designated VR space.

⑦ Post-Use Care

- **Clean Devices:** Sanitize headsets and controllers after each use.
- **Check for Issues:** Report any device problems to your school's tech support.

⑧ Privacy & Data Security

- **No Recording Without Consent:** Don't record or take screenshots of students in VR without prior permission.
- **Follow School Policy:** Make sure any VR software complies with privacy and data protection guidelines.

⑨ Evaluation

- **Get feedback:** After each session, provide students opportunities to give feedback, identify problems, and/or offer suggestions.

Responsive Teaching About Human Rights Abuses

① Prepare Yourself as the Educator

- Familiarize Yourself with Content: Review all materials in advance and assess your own prior knowledge. Educate yourself as needed.
- Know Your Students: Be aware of students' backgrounds; some may have personal or family experiences related to the topics.

② Set a Framework for Engagement

- Establish Classroom Norms: Discuss respect, empathy, and confidentiality. Remind students these are difficult topics and everyone is entitled to their feelings.
- Create a Safe Space: Encourage open dialogue but make clear everyone's privacy and emotional safety are paramount.

③ Provide Context and Support

- Historical & Cultural Context: Give students necessary background information before presenting emotionally charged materials.
- Trigger Warnings: Let students know in advance about potentially disturbing content ("content warnings") and allow them the option to step out if needed.

④ Offer Choices and Agency

- Alternative Assignments: Have options for students who feel uncomfortable engaging with certain materials.
- Student Input: Allow students to share their concerns or needs privately before you begin the unit.

⑤ Encourage Critical and Compassionate Thinking

- Discuss Emotional Impact: Acknowledge that strong reactions are normal and encourage respectful processing.
- Facilitate Reflective Dialogues: Guide students to thoughtful analysis, avoiding sensationalism or judgment.

⑥ Monitor and Respond to Well-being

- Watch for Signs of Distress: Check in with students during and after lessons, especially those who may have been affected.
- Offer Support Resources: Make students aware of counseling services or school support staff. Be in communication with support staff ahead of time.

⑦ Frame Learning Around Empowerment

- Focus on Agency and Action: Balance the discussion of abuses with stories of resistance, activism, and positive change.
- Encourage Constructive Responses: Allow students to channel their learning into actionable projects or awareness campaigns if appropriate.

⑧ Follow School Policy and Legal Guidelines

- Consent and Parental Notification: If required by your school, notify parents/guardians about the curriculum and seek consent.
- Respect Privacy: Ensure students' confidentiality when sharing experiences or reactions.

⑨ Debrief and Reflect

- Post-Lesson Reflection: Use writing prompts or private discussions to help students process what they've learned.
- Feedback Opportunity: Let students share feedback about the materials and discussions for future improvements.

Lesson 3 Extension:

Lesson 3: Looking for Patterns of War Crimes

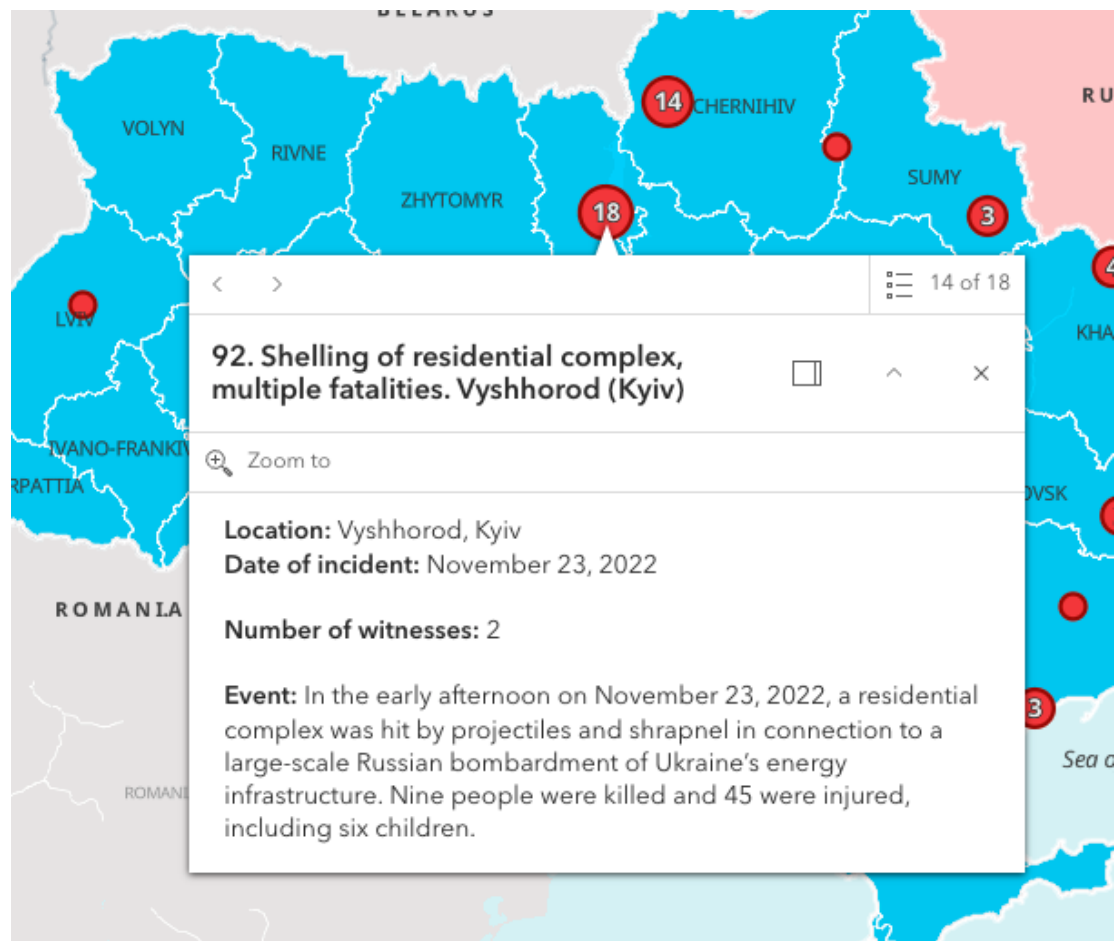
Overview

In Lesson 3, students use an online incident map tool to analyze patterns of war crimes in Ukraine. Based on their exploration of the map and a review of war crimes from Lesson 2, they generate an evidence-based conclusion about these patterns.

Incident map:

<https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/thereckoningproject/interactive-maps/>

To extend this lesson and transition to the VR experience, students are asked to explore incident #92, which can be located by clicking on the red circle for the location of Kyiv, and scrolling down to find incident # 92. (shown in the screenshot below).



After reviewing the details of this incident, students work in pairs and explore the VR experience using the activity sequence below. They will consider how the VR narrative connects to the incident description and their observations of patterns of war crimes.

Activity Sequence

- ① As a whole class, have students share reflections on Lesson 3 and what they learned about patterns of incidents and their connection to potential war crimes. Ask students to work in small groups or pairs to find and review incident #92. Have students discuss the following questions in their small groups:
 - Based on Lesson 3, do you think that the bombing of civilian areas is one possible pattern of war crimes in Ukraine?
 - How do you think civilians in Ukraine prepare for large scale bombing attacks? How do you think they experience and cope with these incidents?
- ② After a few minutes discussing these questions in small groups, have a spokesperson for each group share out some of their reflections. Explain to the students that they are now going to participate in a virtual reality experience that will help them add to their answers. Tell them to keep the discussion questions in mind as they move through the virtual reality narrative. Review safety guideline and VR procedures and provide appropriate guidance for self-care (see pages 49–53)
- ③ Have students divide into pairs for the VR experience. One student will put on the headset and engage in the VR while the other student will play two roles: 1) keeping their partner safe by monitoring their movement, 2) and taking notes as the person in the experience engages in a think aloud about what they are seeing.

Before they turn the headsets on, you may want to have students practice these roles to demonstrate what they look and sound like.

Also discuss the purpose and practice of engaging in a think-aloud while in a virtual reality experience. Explain to the students that while they have the headsets on, they will not be able to write anything down. Instead, they will narrate questions and observations as they go through the experience, thinking in particular about the questions they were given to guide their engagement in the experience. The note taker's job is to try and capture the big ideas of what their partner is observing and thinking, and they should not try to write everything down word for word.

Once roles and tasks are clear, have the students enter the VR world and begin.

④ After the first student has finished the experience, the students switch roles and the first student becomes the safety support and note taker, and viewing begins again.

⑤ When both students have gone through the VR experience, have them work as a team to review and combine their notes to create a reflection of what they were thinking about and noticing in the experience. If time allows, you can have them go through it again to add to their observations, thoughts, and notes.

⑥ Bring the whole class back together and invite students to share reflections and observations from their VR experience. Present them with the discussion questions from the beginning of the activity again (below) and ask them to turn and talk about how the VR experience supported, extended, or challenged their thinking.

- Based on Lesson 3, do you think that the bombing of civilian areas is one possible pattern of war crimes in Ukraine?
- How do you think civilians in Ukraine prepare for large scale bombing attacks? How do you think they experience and cope with these incidents?

Have several different people share their ideas and engage the whole class in a discussion. Close the discussion out by asking students to share ideas about how these new insights might help them think about these kinds of bombings as potential war crimes.

Lesson 4 Extension:

Lesson 4 Incident Case Studies

Overview

In Lesson 4, students work in collaborative groups to analyze one incident using the Rome Statute to identify what war crimes may have been perpetrated. Student groups collaborate to explain why they think their selected incident maps onto a particular set of criteria for different war crimes, and they make a recommendation for which crimes they think will be most relevant for prosecutors to pursue.

Specific war crime	Does this incident seem related to this war crime? (Y/N)	If yes, do we recommend investigation and possible prosecution? (Consider the available evidence, perpetrators, other relevant war crimes, number of victims, etc.) Why or why not?
(i) Intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities;		
(ii) Intentionally directing attacks against civilian objects, that is, objects which are not military objectives;		
(iii) Intentionally directing attacks against personnel, installations, material, units or vehicles involved in a humanitarian assistance or peacekeeping mission in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, as long as they are entitled to the protection given to civilians or civilian objects under the international law of armed conflict;		

To extend this lesson with the VR experience, engage the students in the activity sequence below.

Activity Sequence

- ① As a whole class, have students share reflections on Lesson 4 and what they learned about war crimes. Then ask students to work in small groups or pairs to find and review the war crimes on page 42 in the “War crimes review checklist” in the textbook for *The Reckoning Project @ WCEE: Investigating War Crimes in Ukraine*.

-
- ② Have students discuss the following questions in their small groups:
 - What makes the war crimes on this page different from some of the others?
 - If you were investigating these war crimes, who would you want to talk to? And what would you try to learn?
 - What might you learn from witnesses and survivors of these attacks that would help prosecutors make a case for war crimes?
 - ③ After a few minutes discussing these questions in small groups, have a spokesperson for each group share out some of their reflections. Explain to the students that they are now going to participate in a virtual reality experience that will help them add to their answers. Tell them to keep the discussion questions in mind as they move through the virtual reality narrative. Review safety guidelines and VR procedures and provide appropriate guidance for self-care (see pages 49–53)
 - ④ Have students divide into pairs for the VR experience. One student will put on the headset and engage in the VR while the other student will play two roles: 1) keeping their partner safe by monitoring their movement, 2) and taking notes as the person in the experience engages in a think aloud about what they are seeing.

Before they turn the headsets on, you may want to have students practice these roles to demonstrate what they look and sound like.

Also discuss the purpose and practice of engaging in a think aloud while in a virtual reality experience. Explain to the students that while they have the headsets on, they will not be able to write anything down. Instead, they will narrate questions and observations as they go through the experience, thinking in particular about the questions they were given to guide their engagement in the experience. The note taker's job is to try and capture the big ideas of what their partner is observing and thinking, and they should not try to write everything down word for word.

Once roles and tasks are clear, have the students enter the VR world and begin.

- ⑤ After the first student has finished the experience, the students switch roles and the first student becomes the safety support and note taker, and viewing begins again.
- ⑥ When both students have gone through the VR experience, have them work as a team to review and combine their notes to create a reflection of what they were thinking about and noticing in the experience. If time allows, you can have them go through it again to add to their observations, thoughts, and notes.
- ⑦ Bring the whole class back together and invite students to share reflections and observations from their VR experience. Present them with the discussion questions (below) from the beginning of the activity again and ask them to turn and talk about how the VR experience supported, extended, or challenged their thinking.

What makes the war crimes on this page different from some of the others?

- If you were investigating these war crimes, who would you want to talk to? And what would you try to learn?
- What might you learn from witnesses and survivors of these attacks that would help prosecutors make a case for war crimes?

⑧ Have several different people share their ideas and engage the whole class in a discussion. Close the discussion out by asking students to share ideas about how these new insights might help them think about these kinds of bombings as potential war crimes and also to consider what types of reparations and healing support survivors might need.

Unit-level Extension Project

This activity represents a larger, unit level extension project that will take more time and preparation. In this activity, students take on different investigatory roles to explore the VR experience through the lenses of different fields, including journalism, law, history, and art. Teachers can choose to have their students take on specific roles that align with their content area or use all four roles to introduce elements of voice and choice into the experience.

This activity is structured with a clear Before-During-After flow. As with the other activity options, teachers should review and implement safety guidelines as well as provide appropriate guidance and support for students as they engage with the potential range of emotional responses to this content (see pages 6-9).

Compelling Questions

This activity is grounded in the following compelling questions. These questions are not necessarily going to be fully answered but rather are used by the teacher to frame the experience and encourage reflection and discussion.

- How can immersive technologies like virtual reality help us understand and empathize with victims of war crimes?
- How does eyewitness testimony and personal storytelling shape our understanding of war crimes compared to other forms of evidence?
- Why is it important to remember and study war crimes, and how can virtual reality experiences contribute to education, advocacy, and prevention?

Materials and Preparation

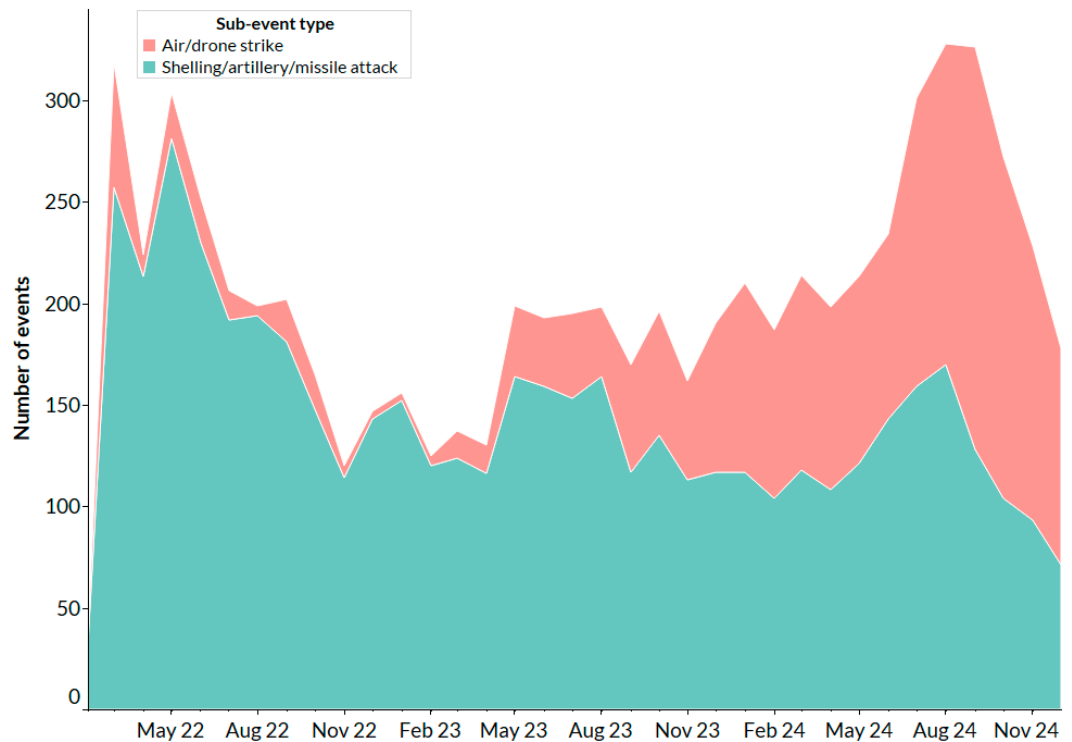
- Review and print role cards (below) for students. How many you print will depend upon your class size, and how you structure the activity (e.g., whether you allow students to choose roles or if you assign ahead of time).
- Students should have already reviewed guidelines for safe VR use, self-care, and how to use the headsets.
- As mentioned in pages 49–53, follow district and school guidelines/policies and get parent permissions as needed and provide alternative activities for students who opt out.
- Arrange your classroom and physical space for maximum safety (e.g., clear floor spaces where students will be standing).
- Students will be working in pairs. Using what you know about your students, consider how you will form teams (teacher-selected or student-selected). Have a plan for odd numbers (how will you manage a group of 3), as well as how you will integrate and support any students who others might not want to work with.
- Sanitize and prepare headsets.

Before VR Immersion

① Explain to the students that they are going to begin a small project in which they will use virtual reality to explore the bombing of civilian areas in Ukraine by the Russian military in the context of investigating potential war crimes. Tell them that before they launch into the virtual reality setting, they are going to consider some data. Project the table below onto your screen or board:

Russian remote attacks against civilians in Ukraine

February 2022 - December 2024



<https://acleddata.com/report/bombing-submission-russian-targeting-civilians-and-infrastructure-ukraine>

② Tell the students that these data come from ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data). Read the following description from ACLED's website:

ACLED is an independent, impartial global monitor that collects, analyses, and maps data on conflict and protest. ACLED provides detailed information to help identify, understand, and track patterns and trends in conflict and crisis situations around the world.

Direct the students to work with a partner to do a **See-Think-Wonder** thinking routine with this graph. Working together, they should jot down observations, noting down what they see. This might include observations about the table, the X&Y axes, and

overall trends and patterns. Next, they should jot down what these observations make them think about the war in Ukraine. What patterns and connections do these data surface for them? They should then jot down questions, what they wonder, in response to these data. Explain that they will be asked to share some of their notes in a few minutes and have them begin.

When students have had sufficient time for the See-Think-Wonder, bring the class back together and invite different pairs to share big ideas from each category. Ask students to listen for common threads and to think about the big picture presented by these data. Guide the discussion as needed with open questions and prompts to help surface the larger patterns (e.g., drone strikes becoming more common than missile strikes). Clarify any potential areas of confusion (e.g., difference between drones and missiles).

Next engage the whole class in discussion around the following question:

- What do these numbers represent and why do they matter? What do these data hide or leave out? What important parts of this story are we missing?

After some discussion, tell the students that you will come back to these questions, but that now they are going to transition to learning about this same topic through a different lens, Virtual Reality.

③ Have students stop and jot in response to the following questions:

- Have you ever experienced virtual reality before? In what context? What was it like?
- If not, what do you think it will be like?

Then have students turn and talk to share reflections. Next introduce the following questions and have students turn and talk again:

- What role do you think virtual reality experiences can play in helping us to develop empathy or understanding of other people and their experiences?
- What does virtual reality offer that a graph or an article does not?

Call on a few pairs to share their ideas and then engage the class in a whole group discussion about these questions. Encourage students to use examples and evidence to support any ideas they have.

④ Now prepare for the VR immersion. If you have not already done so, review guidelines and procedures, form teams (with Student A and B), and explain procedures for passing out and later returning headsets.

During VR Immersion

⑤ Set the next segment up by explaining to the students that they will first take turns going into the experience to make general observations, but then they will go in again with a specific role that will guide their exploration and help them analyze the impact

of the bombardments on the Ukrainian civilian population. They will consider how these kinds of attacks impact people’s lives, and also what the scale and scope of the bombing suggests about the intentions of Russia and possible war crimes. Tell them they should also think about how people are resilient and find ways to continue with their daily lives in spite of this violence.

Review the overall sequence of the activity. There will be three “rounds” or phases.

- In Round 1, Student A will enter the experience to make observations. As they engage in the VR, they will describe what they see and their partner, Student B, will take notes and try to capture the big ideas. Student B should also keep the person in the experience safe.
- In Round 2, partners switch roles and Student B observes and tries to add new ideas while Student A takes notes and monitors safety.
- In Round 3, the partners review the roles below and select one. They then take turns going back into the virtual reality experience to take notes on relevant components of the experience related to their role.

Review possible roles and their different goals:

Journalist: Aims to reveal personal stories and highlight both resilience and the reality of ongoing trauma, helping inform the public and policymakers.

Lawyer: Pursues accountability, rights, and the legal framework in place or lacking, exploring both local and international justice.

Historian: Seeks context and continuity, analyzing patterns, historical significance, and the future shaping of collective memory.

Artist: Considers art’s power to represent trauma, foster empathy, and promote healing or social change.

⑥ Begin the main VR experience with Round 1. Tell the students they should observe and think about:

- The overall events depicted in the VR.
- What seems similar to their own life and living space and what seems different.
- What was the most impactful or surprising.
- And what questions the experience generates for them.

⑦ Round 2

- Team members switch roles and repeat experience

⑧ Round 3

- Pass out the role cards and have each team select a role. Be sure to review the “What to look and listen for” section of each card and be sure students understand how this role should guide their next visit to the VR experience.
- Have students take turns going back into VR with their new lenses, with the other student still taking notes and monitoring safety.
- When both students have had a turn, give them time to review and consolidate their new notes related to their role.

Journalist

Questions

- How have repeated missile and drone attacks reshaped everyday life for civilians in Ukrainian cities like Kyiv?
- What coping strategies are emerging among survivors?

What to Look/Listen For

- Basic details (who, what, when, where, etc)
- Evidence of damage/destruction
- Changes in behaviors
- Impacts on daily life, choices
- Coping strategies

Lawyer / Legal Investigator

Questions

- What kinds of information can I gather from this incident that would help me make a legal case for war crimes?
- How might I gather evidence?
- What information might help me make an argument for reparations?

What to Look/Listen For

- Details on the size and scope of the attacks, as well as targets.
- Types of weapons and points of origin.
- The impacts of the attacks on people and infrastructure.
- Potential information showing planning and intent for the perpetrator.

Historian

Questions

- In what ways do the civilian experiences of missile and drone attacks in Ukraine compare to similar instances in previous conflicts?
- How might new technologies influence the historical record and collective national memory?

What to Look/Listen For

- Overview information on the human experience, what it is like to live through these particular bombings.
- Types of technologies leveraged on both sides.
- The role of technology in both building defensive and protective systems and managing the attacks.
- Change in the nature of warfare.

Artist / Creator

Questions

- How can creative expression—through mediums such as painting, photography, literature, or film—help capture the emotional and psychological realities of Ukrainian civilian survivors?
- What role might art play in healing or advocacy?

What to Look/Listen For

- Powerful imagery or ideas
- Expressions of emotion by the narrator.
- Symbols or motifs, or objects that speak to you.
- Words or phrases that appeal to emotion or that struck you in some way
- Colors, images, or other visual effects that could inspire art.

After VR Immersion

9 Immediately after the VR immersion rounds end, have student teams compare their experiences and synthesize their observations to generate a response to the guiding questions for their roles.

10 Next, guide a whole class discussion that begins with student pairs reporting out on their conclusions. Encourage students to ask questions of each other and engage with each other's ideas.

Then introduce any or all of the following questions for further discussion. Consider having pairs chat with other pairs about these questions and then share their big ideas with the whole class.

- Who do you think this VR experience is for (audience) and what is its purpose?
- Why is virtual reality a powerful way to explore these issues?
- What impacted you the most?
- What questions do you have?
- What does this experience suggest to you about the war in Ukraine and the actions of the Russian government and military?
- What does it suggest about how people are resilient?
- Why do you think the author or creator of this virtual reality experience chose to include a child's perspective/experiences? What does this add?
- What do you think about this format as a means of storytelling with respect to issues like the personal and familial impact of war?
- What does this virtual reality experience not show you? What does it leave out? Why do you think the designer of the experience made these choices?

Or consider the questions below for thematic discussions:

- In the virtual reality experience, we get a sense that these sorts of attacks have become so common that people are getting used to them. Daily routines continue, even if aspects of them change. Why do you think this happens? What might be the long-term impacts of this on people's mental health and hope for the future? What thoughts or questions does this surface for you? If you were speaking with someone in Ukraine who lives through these experiences regularly, what questions might you have for them?
- Why do you think the government of Ukraine uses text message systems as a primary means of communicating with the population when there are bombings? What are the advantages to this? What might be some of the disadvantages to this?

- What kinds of information do the text message alerts provide about the specific munitions and weapons used in the attack? How does this information help you better understand the size and scope of these attacks? Do you think that the events depicted in the virtual reality experience could be considered war crimes? Using the criteria from the Rome Statute, what war crimes do you think might be happening in events like these?

Final Project Options

Consider having students develop a final project that corresponds to their selected role.

<i>Role</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Project / Product</i>
Journalist	Aims to reveal personal stories and highlight both resilience and the reality of ongoing trauma, helping inform the public and policymakers.	Journalistic account of the attack that includes details from the text alerts as well as views/perspectives of the narrator.
Lawyer	Pursues accountability, rights, and the legal framework in place or lacking, exploring both local and international justice.	Clear argument identifying specific war crimes from the Rome Statutes that should be prosecuted in connection with this attack, using details from the VR example to make the case that the incident meets the criteria for these crimes.
Historian	Seeks context and continuity, analyzing patterns, historical significance, and the future shaping of collective memory.	Historical analysis of change and continuity with respect to the use of technology in warfare, focused on how drones, smart phones, and the internet have changed warfare, but also discussing what has not changed (requires prior knowledge and review of past wars and technology).
Artist	Considers art's power to represent trauma, foster empathy, and promote healing or social change.	An original work of art responding to the need to work for peace, provide justice and healing for survivors of war crimes, and/or encourage hope in the face of great injustice.