The Roles **Language and Power** Play in Genocide:  
A Proposed Teaching Unit  
For Sophomore English Students  
At Brockton High School, Brockton, Massachusetts

Articles and excerpts needed:

- From Change.Org packet online

Other items needed:

- Class sets of Elie Wiesel’s *Night*
- IRC access (for class use of computers and tables), or alternatively, computer labs
- Posters (or white “Stick it!” giant writing pads)
- Scissors, tape, glue, coloring materials
- Volunteers for the “presidential cabinet”
Unit Description:

The Overview:

I propose a unit that will give my yearly teaching of Night more significance to my students if they see that the Holocaust is not just an isolated event.

Students will begin by discussing language in general, in particular, how languages other than English are often perceived as “threats” or looked down upon by some people. That will open a discussion to the function and role language plays in power relations, especially as it pertains to genocide and the silencing of individuals, robbing them of their language and power.

Students will read several excerpts from this course, including those from Zhan Lu and Pérez Miller from this course, as well as those on the language of propaganda because I feel they open up good discussion points that are relevant in the students’ lives and are a natural bridge into the genocide unit, which is about a different aspect of language and power.

Students will then begin their Genocide Projects. Working in small groups, each group will pick a country or group of people out of a hat (Native Americans, Armenians, Cambodians, Bosnians, Rwandans, and several others). The Holocaust is not an option to research as we will be reading Night, and one of the objectives is not to diminish the Holocaust’s impact, but to show students that there were atrocities before and after the Holocaust.

They will research their country in the school’s IRC (library), or computer lab if the IRC is not available. They will be given “Guiding Questions” (See Appendix #1) to help them collect information they will need for their poster, and persuasive letter to the president.

Students will create a poster that shows the horror of their country’s genocide, as well as advocates for assistance. Students will include: name of country/people, dates, leader(s), and method of genocide, HOW is this a genocide, images, and a question that calls the viewer to action.

Students will then write a persuasive letter to the U.S. President at the time their genocide was occurring. They will describe what is happening (who is being targeted, who is responsible, what is being done to the victims? How many lives have already been lost? What is planned next?) and what they want the President to do, such as send in ground troops, the Red Cross, food, clothing, etc.

Students will present their posters and letters before a “presidential cabinet,” who after hearing their claims, will decide whether or not to grant the aid they requested based on how persuasive they were. Students must use POWERFUL LANGUAGE, which they’ve learned all about by this point, to get “their country” the aid they need.
The Learners and Their Needs

While this unit could be used for any sophomore English class of any level (college prep, college prep advanced, or honors, as well as in co-taught sections of any level), this unit was specifically designed for co-taught college prep and college prep advanced sophomores. Substituting excerpts or supplements while reading *Night* could adapt the unit to the needs of any student.

According to a 2014 Harvard University Study, there are

- over 4,300 enrolled
- Poverty Level: 72%
- Minority population: 71%
- Between 50-60% speak a language other than English in their home
- 38% do not speak English as their primary language
- Approximately 12% in Transitional Bilingual Ed.
- Approximately 11% receive Special Education Services
  - Student Population
    - 55.5% Black - includes African-American, Cape Verdean, Haitian, Jamaican, and others
    - 28% White
    - 11.2% Hispanic
    - 2.5% Asian
    - .8% Native American
    - 2% Multi-Race

(*The Achievement Gap Initiative, 2014*)

As a teacher at the high school, I know that there are more than 70 co-taught classes at the high school, mainly in English and math, but with some in history and science. Also, the higher the level, such as junior or senior year, the less likely there is a course that is co-taught. There are more ELL students in co-taught classes than there are in the mainstream classes.
Unit Plan Schedule

Massachusetts ELA Curriculum Frameworks Standards:

- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. Craft and Structure
- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone

Brockton High School Literacy Objectives:

- to participate in class discussion or a public forum
- to gather information, to respond to what one has read, viewed, or heard
- to use analogies and evidence to support one's thinking
- productive use and understanding of technology to obtain, exchange, evaluate and organize information
- appreciation, respect, and understanding of the similarities and differences among people
- the ability to work cooperatively with others
- literacy in reading: for content (both literal and inferential); to apply pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading strategies to all reading assignments
- to research a topic
### Projected Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEET IN THE IRC (LIBRARY) THROUGH THURSDAY</th>
<th>MEETING IN THE IRC (LIBRARY)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Opening discussion:</strong> What does the word &quot;genocide&quot; mean? (If you speak another language, what does it mean in that language? Discuss Lemkin’s 1943 extended definition. Students will begin researching their country's genocide using &quot;Guiding Questions.&quot;)</td>
<td>Opening discussion: What does the word &quot;genocide&quot; mean? (If you speak another language, what does it mean in that language?) Discuss Lemkin’s 1943 extended definition. Students will begin researching their country’s genocide using “Guiding Questions.”</td>
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**Homework:** If not done, complete “Guiding Questions.”

| **Discuss reactions to article excerpts from homework. Do you feel this sense of inequality Pérez-Miller describes is in YOUR classrooms? In YOUR lives?** Read selections from “Living English” by Min-Zhan Lu. Students will underline at least two statements to discuss. Discuss talking points. **Homework:** Writing prompt to share tomorrow: Zhau Lu shows how English only instruction FORCED English on some students. Pick one example from history where one group of people FORCED another group to do something they didn’t want to do. Make sure to use the word POWER in your response: what role does POWER play in your example? | **Pick groups and pick your country or targeted people from a hat (Native Americans, Armenians, Ukraine, women in Nanking, Cambodia, Guatemala, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Darfur). Look at propaganda translations and images from the time period your group’s genocide took place. Discuss common themes you see and underline repeated words or phrases. Discuss the role language plays in the genocide of your people or country. How did the perpetrators (the criminals) use their POWER to commit the genocide?**

**Homework:** Pick the image or excerpt that impacted you most today and write either a paragraph or a 10 line poem (any style) explaining your reaction/feelings. |

| Use answers to “Guiding Questions” to complete poster with country’s name, targeted group, how this is an example of genocide, dates, leaders, visuals, etc. (requirement sheet given out). **Homework:** Find one quote about genocide to share with your group tomorrow. You will decide if one, two or more go on your poster or will be used in your presentation. | **Presentations with poster, and letter. Target audience: the president and his presidential cabinet at the time your genocide is happening. Convince them (use POWERFUL LANGUAGE) that your genocide is an issue they must do something about right now, and tell them what you want to do (troops, medicine, catch the leaders, etc.)**

**Homework:** Practice your presentation with your persuasive letter. |

| **Discuss homework from last night.** Argument v. persuasion handout; audience and purpose handout (Appendix # 1.) Practice writing a persuasive letter. Students must use the POWER of LANGUAGE through their words to convince their audience. **Homework:** None | **Complete persuasive letter to the president of the country at the time of your genocide.** **Homework:** None |

| **Complete persuasive letter template with important information included (addresses, dates, correct president, persuasive words (“Powerful Negative Words” Appendix LA), etc.** | **Complete persuasive letter to the president of the country at the time of your genocide.** **Homework:** None |

| **Practice presentations with poster, and letter.** Target audience: the president and his presidential cabinet at the time your genocide is happening. Convince them (use POWERFUL LANGUAGE) that your genocide is an issue they must do something about right now, and tell them what you want to do (troops, medicine, catch the leaders, etc.)**

**Homework:** Practice your presentation with your persuasive letter. | **Present to the “presidential cabinet” (of volunteers from outside the class) who will determine if the country will receive aid based on how persuasive the presentation is. Is the language and are the examples powerful enough?**

**Homework:** Reflect on your presentation. What would you have added, changed, deleted, or done differently? Would you have said something more/else? What? If you could meet before the “presidential cabinet” again? |
Discuss quote: “Convinced that this period in history would be judged one day, I knew that I must bear witness. I also knew that, while I had many things to say, I did not have the words to say them. Painfully aware of my limitations, I watched helplessly as language became an obstacle. It became clear that it would be necessary to invent a new language. But how was one to rehabilitate and transform words perverted by the enemy” (Wiesel ix).

Watch video clip of Elie Wiesel discussing language.

In groups, then as a class, discuss the role they think language plays in Wiesel’s life based on the quote and video clip.

**Homework:** Read anti-Jewish decrees.

Discuss anti-Jewish decrees. At what point would you leave if it were you or your family? [http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/voices/info/decrees/decrees.html](http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/voices/info/decrees/decrees.html)

Read preface to the memoir.

Give students copy of final assignment essay prompt so they can do the pre-writing during their reading of the memoir.

Continue with Night unit as taught before, focusing on the way Wiesel uses the words from the final assignment.

In class typed reflection (computer lab). Describe how your interpretation, feelings, thoughts, or ideas have changed about the ideas of LANGUAGE, POWER, or LANGUAGE AND POWER personally, as well as how it applies to history (your genocide project). Timed writing, (SAT/ACT and college admission prep) due at the end of class.

### Assessment Tool

The students will be assessed on their presentations to the presidential cabinet, but the culminating assignment will the essay that addresses what specific words mean (night, fire, silence, hunger, and not the word, but the *experience* of power) to Elie Wiesel, and the role language and power play in his interpretation of the words as opposed to someone who has not survived the Holocaust.

**Prompt:** Using the words you tracked throughout the memoir, write an essay in which you attempt to explain what these words may mean to Elie Wiesel compared to someone who has not survived a genocide. Do these words hold more power for him than other people? How have the Nazis forever taken power of these words (language) in Wiesel’s life?

Essays must respond to all parts of the question and address all words. They must be at least three pages, typed in 12” font. Use language that is appropriate to your audience (who should hear the message in your essay?), but keep the language school appropriate.
The Literature Review:

My teaching unit on genocide and how language and power play a role in it, begins (metaphorically) and ends (literally) with Nobel Prize Winner Elie Wiesel’s memoir Night, which details his experience surviving the Holocaust as a fifteen year old boy. In order for students to understand the role language and power play in genocide, students need to understand the role language plays in their own lives and historically, as well as examine the role a dominant language like English plays, and the role native language(s) have played in different genocides.

To begin however, students must have a background knowledge of language, power and the potential for great evil the two hold when they intersect. Ashley Miller Pérez examines the role language and power play in inequalities; she says that the “belief that one language is superior to another” has led to linguicism, which she says is the “ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate. Effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language (on the basis of their mother tongues)”, is best seen within a context of linguistic imperialism... [...] promote the worldwide use of English for economic and political purposes” (33-34). Students who attend a multilingual Brockton High where many students speak a language other than English at home may often feel that “unequal division of power” and felt that their native language is deemed inferior. Exploring this concept will bridge students into the idea of not just a language being superior and being defined by a language, but a race or people being deemed “superior” and defined by their race or some other arbitrary trait (like being educated or wearing glasses, as in the case of the Cambodian genocide). Students will begin to bridge the connection and see that language through propaganda and manipulation is
used for political gain (get rid of a smaller group to gain the support of the majority such as in
the Bosnian genocide), or, like Pérez Miller mentions, for personal reasons, such as with Hitler,
who wanted to rid the world for his own deluded political reasons, but also because personally,
he did not like Jews.

By examining the discrimination those who speak "other" languages (in America,
languages other than English) experience, students can make personal connections and explore
the implications for themselves in the present and post-graduation. Lu says "[English only
efforts] aim to control not merely which language can be used by its actual, possible, or
imagined users. And they discipline users to be preoccupied with two and only two questions:
What counts as correct usage in the eyes of those who in positions to withhold educational and
job opportunities?" (Lu 605). While she speaks of English-only instruction, which we do not
have at Brockton High, the idea of one group abusing power (politicians over ESL students) for
political or personal gain (here, both, in terms of cold hard money), runs through Lu's article.

Pérez Miller discusses the "struggle for power through language" (33), which is often
one element of genocide; the people are metaphorically silenced, literally silenced, or both.
Their words no longer have any power to stop what will happen to them. Pérez Miller states
that "the practice of denying the importance and value of other languages and their use serves
to deny the rights of certain linguistic groups the ability to speak and be heard. As a result,
their voices are silenced, their home language marginalized, and their potential power
diminished" (34). Genocide begins as the slow, systematic show of power. As Elie Wiesel
quotes his father as saying in his memoir about some of the imposed wearing of the Star of
David as one of the anti-Jewish decrees the Nazis had imposed “The yellow star? So what? It's
not lethal...” (11). Wiesel’s father viewed even this mandatory arm-band as a pain, but not a foreboding sign, even after Jews were given curfews, had to give up all gold, and several other human rights violations.

The Holocaust was the first time a mass murder had been called a genocide, because until Raphael Lemkin invented the word in 1943 in response to Hitler’s systematic exterminations of what he deemed “undesirables” simply because he had power to do so (Thomas 4). Wiesel is determined to not let Hitler continue to take power from the Jews, and other victims of genocide and mass violence by telling his story. He wants people to use their words, use the power of their words, to not remain silent. He says about his experience of surviving the Holocaust: “Convinced that this period in history would be judged one day, I knew that I must bear witness. I also knew that, while I had many things to say, I did not have the words to say them. Painfully aware of my limitations, I watched helplessly as language became an obstacle. It became clear that it would be necessary to invent a new language. But how was one to rehabilitate and transform words perverted by the enemy?” (Wiesel ix). Students will address that very question at the end of their unit, and hopefully advocate not only against injustice or crimes against humanity, but also for themselves as individuals whose words matter, whether those words are in English, Portuguese, spoken, written or else.
Work Cited


Reflection on the Teaching Unit

This course, in particular being present for one of my peers’ presentations that in part examined Nazis, inspired me to make my yearly Night unit more meaningful to my students. Having a significant percentage of ESL students, discussing the role language plays in their life, such as pressures to use English in certain situations, and specifically the role power plays a role in their choice to use one language or another, will be a nice opening to the unit. While I survey students at the beginning of the year and find out what languages they speak and what language their parents are most comfortable both reading and writing in, I primarily use that information to determine who needs documents (such as progress reports, goal reflection letters, etc.) sent home in another language, and if I will need a translator to call home should I have any concerns or compliments.

Combining the words “language” and “power” connotes people standing up for themselves and their identities as proud bilinguals, but it can also connotes the stripping of a group’s power, first through language, then through physical means such as rape, starvation, murder, etc. I wanted to examine both the positive sides of language (own it!), and how it can be used to abuse (propaganda in genocide). Students’ persuasive letter writing to the president along with their presentations make them see immediately the consequences of the power (or lack thereof) of their words. If no aid is granted, what did the students need to say in order to be convincing? How could their language be more powerful?

The final assignment for Night is completely different than anything I have done before at the end of the memoir. The words are listed at the beginning of the memoir in the author’s preface, but I never really thought how often they are repeated throughout the novel until I
checked. To have students look at their usage altogether paints a picture of the way Wiesel feels about those words—not just in English, but in all languages. Those words have become so powerful they transcend tongues, paper and sound. For students to see the impact words can have, and hopefully Wiesel’s memoir and its message: MY EXPERIENCE WAS NOT AN ISOLATED EVENT! SPEAK UP AND DO NOT STAY SILENT! USE YOUR LANGUAGE AND STOP INJUSTICE!—Well, then I will have done my job.
GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR YOUR GENOCIDE RESEARCH

1. What were the leaders?

2. What group of people was the target of the mass killings?

3. Where did it happen?

4. When did it happen? (Remember, note when it began and when it ended.)

Place where genocide happened:

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Period:

Group Members' Names:
Languages Survey

I consider my primary language to be: ________________________________

I can read in (what language(s)):

I can write in (what language(s)):

I can speak in (what language(s)):

I am most comfortable reading in:

I am most comfortable writing in:

I am most comfortable speaking in:

At home, I prefer or typically speak: ________________________________

At school, in the halls and cafeteria, I usually speak ________________________________ with friends. (Do you speak different languages or change the way you talk depending on which friends you are with? If so, explain.)

Outside of school, if I am in a public place, I typically use ________________________________.

Do you use a different language or change the way you talk depending on where you are? If so, explain.

Do you ever feel pressured to use English or speak or write a certain way in specific situations? Why? Explain.
Argument and Persuasion

With **argument**, you appeal to your audience's LOGIC or REASONING.

With **persuasion**, you appeal to your audience's EMOTIONS.

With both, you are trying to convince someone to believe, do, or say what **YOU** want them to believe, do, or say.

**Some samples:**

**Situation:** You want a raise at work.

**Use persuasion to make this happen:**
I'm a single mother whose husband cheated on me with my sister and left me with five kids to raise on my own. I can barely afford to pay my rent and without this raise I might end up homeless. I really need this raise, [she starts crying]

**Use argument to make this happen:**
I am a reliable employee who has not once been late in the ten years I have worked here and the only time I missed a day of work was the day I broke my arm, and I came back to work the next day. I am completely responsible and never miss deadlines. Customers are always complimenting my attitude and work ethic to managers, therefore, I feel I deserve a raise.

**Situation:** You did not do your homework and want to convince your teacher to take it late.

**Use persuasion to make this happen:**
You see, what happened was that my girlfriend broke up with me last night, and then to make matters worse, my dog got hit by a car and he is at the vet having surgery right now. I was just too emotional to be able to focus on anything but my breakup and my poor dog I've had since he was a puppy, whom I love so much. Please, please, please take my homework late. If you don't I will get in trouble with my mom and she will take away my phone. Please, I am begging you.

**Use argument to make this happen:**
I am a responsible student who has never handed in an assignment late before. I always write down my homework in my agenda book and I always make sure to complete my homework before I watch TV or go online. I take my school work seriously. The only reason this assignment is late is because I was helping an aunt move, and my agenda book somehow made it into one of her moving boxes. I tried to contact some people from the class to find out what the homework was, but I was unable to reach anyone. I even tried e-mailing you, but I know that teachers do not always check e-mail at home. If you accept this assignment late, it will never happen again.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Powerful Negative Words</th>
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<tr>
<td>Horrific</td>
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<tr>
<td>Terrible</td>
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<td>Dreadful</td>
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<td>Awful</td>
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<td>Shocking</td>
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<td>Ghastly</td>
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<td>Frightening</td>
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<td>Grisly</td>
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# Eight Stages of Genocide

Group Members: ________________________________

Country/location atrocity happened: ____________ When happened: _________________

U.S. President(s) when the genocide happened: ______________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of Genocide</th>
<th>Details of Stage (What happens to the people or country during this stage?)</th>
<th>Assistance wanted from US and/or other world leaders (What could leaders do at this point to stop the situation from escalating?)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Classification</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Symbolization</td>
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<td>3. Dehumanization</td>
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<td>4. Organization</td>
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</table>
# Eight Stages of Genocide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of Genocide</th>
<th>Details of Stage</th>
<th>Methods of Prevention</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Classification</td>
<td>- people are separated into categories/groups of &quot;us versus them&quot;&lt;br&gt;- the &quot;them&quot; targeted group is singled out due to nationality, ethnicity, race, or religion&lt;br&gt;- (i.e. German and Jew/ Hutu and Tutsi)</td>
<td>■ Develop universal institutions that actively promote tolerance and understanding of treating others as you want to be treated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Symbolization</td>
<td>- names or symbols are given to the classification of the targeted group&lt;br&gt;(i.e. name people “Jews”or “Gypsies,” or distinguish them by colors or dress, and apply symbols to groups’ members – yellow star for Jews under Nazi rule/ blue scarf for people from the Eastern Zone in Khmer Rouge Cambodia)</td>
<td>■ Legally forbid/outlaw hate symbols (i.e. swastikas), hate speech, and group marking like gang clothing or tribal scarring.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Dehumanization</td>
<td>- the targeted group is equated with &quot;animals, vermin, insects, or diseases&quot;&lt;br&gt;- propaganda is used to encourage the dehumanization of the targeted group (i.e. hate propaganda is printed and broadcasting from hate radios is used to vilify the victims)</td>
<td>■ Condemn the use of hate speech and make it culturally unacceptable.&lt;br&gt;■ Ban leaders who encourage genocide from international travel and have their foreign finances frozen.&lt;br&gt;■ Shut down hate radio stations and ban hate propaganda.&lt;br&gt;■ Promptly punish hate crimes and atrocities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Organization</td>
<td>- special army units or militias are trained and armed&lt;br&gt;- the killings are planned</td>
<td>■ Make membership in special army units or militias committing hate crimes illegal and demand that their leaders be arrested.&lt;br&gt;■ Deny visas to leaders of hate groups and freeze their foreign assets.&lt;br&gt;■ UN should impose arms embargoes on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5. Polarization | - the groups are driven apart by extremists  
- hate groups print propaganda and broadcast propaganda against the victims | - Provide security protection for moderate leaders or assistance to human rights groups.  
- Seize the assets of extremists and deny visas for international travel to extremists.  
- Use international sanctions to oppose coups d’état by extremists. |
| 6. Preparation | - the targeted people/victims are separated from others and forced to wear identifying symbols  
(i.e. separated from others and sent to ghettos, concentrations camps, or a famine struck region and starved)  
- death lists are made and trial massacres are conducted | - With evidence of death lists, arms shipments, militia training, and trial massacres, a Genocide Emergency should be declared.  
- UN should prepare to send in international military intervention and humanitarian relief for the victims. |
| 7. Extermination | - the leaders have the people they have instructed kill the targeted group(s)  
-targeted people are killed with weapons and/or other methods of destruction | - The UN Security Council should authorize and send armed intervention by regional military forces or by a UN force. |
| 8. Denial | - the perpetrators/tormentors cover up evidence of the crimes  
- the perpetrators/tormentors deny the crimes  
- the perpetrators/tormentors block investigations into the crime | - Prosecute the perpetrators in national courts or international tribunals. There the evidence can be heard and the perpetrators punished. |
# Persuasive Letter Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heading and Salutation (use business or friendly letter format, depending on audience)</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paragraph 1</th>
<th>Introduce yourself and the topic. In the last sentence, write a thesis, stating the problem and broad actions needed (like a &quot;should&quot; statement).</th>
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<tr>
<th>Paragraph 2</th>
<th>Reason #1 - provide evidence and facts</th>
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<tr>
<th>Paragraph 3</th>
<th>Reason #2 - provide evidence and facts</th>
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<th>Paragraph 4</th>
<th>Reason #3 - provide evidence and facts</th>
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<tr>
<th>Paragraph 5</th>
<th>Some people may think that .... However ....</th>
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<tr>
<th>Paragraph 6</th>
<th>Conclusion- restate the goal and outline action items</th>
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<th>Closing</th>
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* This outline has been adapted from the Persuasive Letter Outline posted on http://voiceofwitnes.com/VFTSLesson/day4/e_persuasiveoutline.html
8 Stages of Genocide
How Atrocity Occurs in our World

1. Classification:
   - Classification is the categorizing of people into groups. They are classified by race, religion and/or nationality. An us versus them attitude is introduced and promoted.
   - Classification will always take place; it has happened in Ireland. There are divisions drawn between Protestants and Catholics, and between Nationals and Non-Nationals. There are ways of insuring that these classifications don't escalate. If both sides find a common ground, tolerance can grow.

What are some ways that you place people into classifications? What groups, or cliques, do you recognize?