



LESSON

Should the U.S. Support Dictators Who Support the U.S.?

OVERVIEW

Establishing U.S. foreign policy involves making an unending series of decisions about which governments to treat as allies, which to oppose, when to intervene (and in what ways) and when to stay home. These decisions can be exceptionally complex when authoritarian leaders who support U.S. political and/or economic goals also commit atrocities against their own people. That was the case in 1965, when the Indonesian government killed an estimated 1 million of its citizens in the name of fighting communism.

The Indonesian genocide is examined in Joshua Oppenheimer's Academy Award®-nominated documentary *The Look of Silence*. In this lesson, using clips from the film, students will practice listening, reading and research skills as they examine this part of Indonesian-U.S. history. Then they will use what they learn to evaluate American relationships with current allies accused of human rights violations.

POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow anytime during the school year—FOR FREE! Get started by joining our [Community Network](#).

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, students will:

- Learn about the 1965-1966 genocide in Indonesia
- Practice listening skills, note taking, reading informational text, using film as an information source, research skills
- Examine the efficacy of U.S. support for authoritarian governments
- Assess U.S. culpability when the authoritarian regimes the country has supported commit atrocities
- Write a persuasive essay that makes a public policy recommendation

GRADE LEVELS: 10-12, College

SUBJECT AREAS

Civics/Government
English/Language Arts
Global Studies

Media Literacy
Political Science
U.S. History

MATERIALS

- Film clips from *The Look of Silence* and equipment on which to show them
- Internet access for research
- Clip 1 Transcript Handouts (see end of lesson plan)

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

Two class periods (about 80 min.), plus homework.

FILM CLIPS

Film clips provided in this lesson are from *The Look of Silence*.

A Note to Teachers

Many of the clips include graphic and disturbing descriptions of violence. Be prepared for the possibility that the activity could upset some students and consider whether or not the activity is appropriate, especially for students who have themselves experienced violence or atrocities.

Clip 1: “News Report” (2:10 min.)

The clip is a 1967 NBC news report. It begins at approximately 11:30 and ends at 13:40 when reporter Ted Yates signs off.

Adi Rukun, whose brother, Ramli, was killed during the genocide, watches footage from an NBC news report. The report is from the year following the Indonesian “purge” of communists, and it reports on the violence, including the resulting benefits for Goodyear Tire and Rubber (a U.S. company).

Clip 2: “Through The Eyes of the Killers” (3:00 min.)

The clip begins at 59:24 with one of the perpetrators saying, “It’s easy here,” and ends at 01:02:24 with one of the perpetrators saying, “But everybody knows the army was behind it.”

Two death squad members describe how they killed Adi’s brother, Ramli. They also explain why the army directed civilians do the killing.

Clip 3: “Through the Eyes of a Victim” (1:10 min.)

The clip begins at 20:08 with Adi’s mother chopping fruit. It ends at 21:18 with her saying, “I hate them.”

Adi interviews his mother about what it is like to live in a country being run by the people responsible for her son’s murder.

Clip 4: “America Taught Us to Hate Communists” (1:30 min.)

The clip begins at 49:24. Adi is watching a video interview with Amir Siahaan, the commander of the Snake River death squads (and currently a political leader in Indonesia). It ends at 50:54 with Siahaan saying, “We did this because America taught us to hate communists.”

Amir Siahaan describes the genocide and talks about why America should reward the perpetrators for the killings.

ACTIVITY

PREPARATION

This lesson begins with homework. First, ask students what they know about 1965. If they can’t come up with major events (e.g., the United States sent the first ground troops to Vietnam), tell students they must each contribute two items to a class-generated list of significant events.

Depending on the course you are teaching, you might want to limit the search to events related to the United States.

Second, assign students to read the background material on Indonesia and genocide on the official website for the film *The Look of Silence*: <http://thelookofsilence.com/learn#>.

STEP 1: Discuss Research Findings

Begin the activity by having students use findings from their homework to generate a list of what was going on in the world in 1965. Ask them how the Indonesian events they read about fit into the context of their list.

STEP 2: Play Clip 1

After a brief discussion, play **Clip 1** three times:

- The first time, play audio only (black out the screen). Ask students to take notes with a focus on understanding the essential content.
- The second time, show the video along with the audio. Again ask students to take notes on the most important content in the story. After this viewing, pause to divide the class into pairs or small groups, then have students discuss the differences in their notes. How did seeing the video change what they focused on?
- The third time, ask students to focus on analyzing the report. Distribute the **Clip 1 Transcript Handout** (see the end of this lesson plan). Have students use it to jot down questions they have about what they're seeing and hearing. Then distribute the annotated version of the handout. Either as a full class or in small groups, ask students to compare their own questions with the questions in the annotated handout.

STEP 3: Guide the Discussion

As the discussion continues, guide students to think about the follow questions:

- Does the U.S. government, which knew about the violence, share the responsibility for the atrocities? Does knowing that currently the United States has friendly diplomatic relations with Indonesia, and that the perpetrators of the genocide are still in power, affect your answer?
- Should Goodyear be held accountable in any way?
- How does what you've learned about the events in Indonesia inform your opinions about recent or current U.S. relations with governments that violate their citizens' human rights?

If you are constrained by 40-45 minute class periods, wrap up the discussion, but let students know you'll continue to examine these questions in the next class period.

STEP 4: View and Discuss Clips 2- 4

To help students think more deeply about the questions in Step 3, show and discuss **Clips 2, 3 and 4**.

Before you begin, provide context by explaining that in *The Look of Silence*, filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer follows an optometrist, Adi Rukun, whose brother, Ramli, was killed by the death squads. Adi is questioning perpetrators about their role in the killings. Remind students that those who ordered or carried out the executions have remained in power; their actions are officially viewed as heroic. None have been held accountable. That makes many of them unusually willing to talk about their role in the genocide.

STEP 5: Writing Assignment

After the class has had an opportunity to explore fully the film clips and the questions, give this assignment for individual papers:

Choose a nation with which the United States is allied—either diplomatically, economically, or both—that has a dubious track record of human rights violations against its own population (e.g., Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Dominican Republic, China). Write a position paper arguing why the United States should maintain the relationship or why it should end the relationship until the human rights violations stop. The paper should make explicit references to the ways that the Indonesian genocide informs the student’s thinking.

Optional: Set aside another class period for students to share their papers with one another.

EXTENSIONS/ADAPTATIONS

1. ***The Look of Silence*** is Joshua Oppenheimer’s powerful companion piece to the Academy Award®-nominated documentary ***The Act of Killing*** (POV 2014), which also looks at the genocide in Indonesia. Continue the conversation by viewing and discussing ***The Act of Killing*** and/or using the film’s lesson plan, “The Banality of Evil and Modern Atrocities” <http://www.pbs.org/pov/theactofkilling/lesson-plan.php>.
2. Based on their persuasive essays, have students orally debate support for foreign governments led by military officers, dictators or other non-elected authorities.
3. Compare and contrast the Indonesian genocide with other historical genocides that students have studied (e.g., Holocaust in Nazi Germany; Armenian genocide in Turkey; Rwandan genocide).
4. View ***The Look of Silence*** in its entirety with a focus on clips featuring Adi interviewing victims and perpetrators. Use these to help students hone their own interviewing skills and/or conduct oral history interviews in their own families and communities. Let students use the advice on these oral history techniques sites to evaluate the effectiveness of Adi’s interviews:
 - American Association of University Women: “How to Conduct Your Own Oral History Project” <http://www.aauw.org/resource/oral-history-project/>
 - Center for the Study of History and Memory at Indiana University: “Oral History Techniques: How to Organize and Conduct Oral History Interviews” http://www.indiana.edu/~csh/oral_history_techniques.pdf
 - DoHistory.org: “Step-by-Step Guide to Oral History” http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html#QUESTIONS
 - StoryCorps: “10 Conversation Tips for Your StoryCorps App Interview” <https://storycorpsme.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2015/10/Interview-Tips.pdf> (Students conducting their own oral history interviews can do so using the StoryCorps app. Visit <https://storycorps.me> for more information.)
 - The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill: “Oral History” <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/oral-history/>

Note: You may want to instruct students to ignore any references to dated technology (e.g., tape recorders rather than digital devices) and focus on the interviewing techniques.

RESOURCES

POV: *The Look of Silence*

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/thelookofsilence/> — The POV site includes a filmmaker interview and resources, including a discussion guide with background information and additional activity ideas.

The Look of Silence Official Website

<http://thelookofsilence.com/> — The official film website includes additional information on the film, articles, helpful background on Indonesia and the 1965-66 genocide and reports, articles and case studies for further reading.

Human Rights Working Group: Indonesia

www.trunity.net/hrwg/topics/view/51cbfc7ff702fc2ba812b263/ — This coalition of human rights organizations and initiatives has a page dedicated to Indonesia. Of special interest is a report on now-elderly victims of the purge:

www.trunity.net/hrwg/view/news/51cbefc47896bb431f69ef2a/?topic=51cbfc7ff702fc2ba812b263

KontraS (The Commission for “the Disappeared” and Victims of Violence)

www.kontras.org/eng/index.php — This Indonesian nonprofit advocates for human rights and justice for victims of more recent violence and abuses.

The National Security Archive: “The United States and Suharto: April 1966-December 1968. Memorandum From Donald W. Ropa of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow).”

<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB52/doc427.pdf>

— This government document covers U.S. involvement and response to the events discussed in the film.

Tempo: “Requiem for a Massacre”

<http://theactofkilling.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/TEMPO-UK-Edition-HiRes.pdf> — In 2012, one of Indonesia’s leading news magazines published this 75-page special edition on the 1965-1966 killings. It includes testimony from the perpetrators.

United Nations: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

www.un.org/en/documents/udhr - The full text of this seminal United Nations document is available online and may be helpful to students in their analysis.

The Washington Post: “U.S. Officials’ List Aided Indonesian Bloodbath in ‘60s”

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1990/05/21/us-officials-lists-aided-indonesian-bloodbath-in-60s/ff6d37c3-8eed-486f-908c-3eeafc19aab2/> - In 1990, journalist Kathy Kadane wrote this article detailing the involvement of the United States (through the CIA) in Indonesia’s 1965 purge of communists.

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php>

This list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

(http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

[SL.11-12.1](#) Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

[SL.11-12.1.c](#) Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

[SL.11-12.2](#) Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

[SL.11-12.4](#) Present information, findings and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience and a range of formal and informal tasks.

[W.11-12.1](#) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

[W.11-12.2d](#) Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile and analogy, to manage the complexity of the topic

[W.11-12.4](#) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

[W.11-12.7](#)

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

[W.11-12.8](#)

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

[W.11-12.9](#)

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research.

Content Knowledge: (<http://www2.mcrel.org/compendium/>) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.

Language Arts, Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

United States History, Standard 31: Understands economic, social and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Faith Rogow, Ph.D., is the co-author of *The Teacher's Guide to Media Literacy: Critical Thinking in a Multimedia World* (Corwin, 2012) and past president of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. She has written discussion guides and lesson plans for more than 250 independent films.

CLIP 1 TRANSCRIPT HANDOUT

Dialogue	Questions
American News Report 1967	
<p>A largely unnoticed victory over the communists has been decisively won in Southeast Asia. In fact, it is the single biggest defeat ever handed to communists anywhere in the world.</p> <p>Sixteen months ago these beautiful and tranquil-looking islands exploded with stunning violence. In many cases, entire families were liquidated. And the purge continues to this day.</p>	
Bali is such a beautiful island, the people are so attractive, climate is so lovely, it's hard to believe that so many unpleasant things went on here in the last year.	
<p>- <i>Ya, but now Bali becomes more beautiful without communists.</i></p> <p>- What actually happened here in this village?</p> <p>- <i>Some of the communist leaders from this village realized that they did wrong already, and they came to village council and ask when the village council will cleanse their village from the communist people.</i></p> <p>- You mean the communists themselves asked to be killed?</p> <p>- <i>Some of them. And some of them wanted to be killed, and now give me a chance to say goodbye to all of my relatives, and the next morning I'm ready to be killed.</i></p>	
Indonesia has fabulous potential wealth in natural resources. Goodyear Sumatra rubber empire is an example.	
The rubber workers' union was communist run, so after the coup many of them were killed or imprisoned. Some of the survivors—you see them here—still work the rubber, but this time as prisoners. And at gunpoint.	
A different island deals with communist survivors in various ways. In some camps they're starved to death, or released periodically to be killed by local citizens.	
Ted Yates, NBC News, reporting.	

CLIP 1 TRANSCRIPT HANDOUT - ANNOTATED

Dialogue	Sample Questions
American News Report 1967	How did most Americans get news in 1967? Who owned the major news outlets? How does that scenario compare to the way Americans get news today?
A largely unnoticed victory over the communists has been decisively won in Southeast Asia. In fact, it is the single biggest defeat ever handed to communists anywhere in the world. Sixteen months ago these beautiful and tranquil-looking islands exploded with stunning violence. In many cases, entire families were liquidated. And the purge continues to this day.	Does the rest of the report reflect the power of words like “exploded,” “stunning” and “liquidated”? If the communists were defeated, why was the purge still continuing?
Bali is such a beautiful island, the people are so attractive, climate is so lovely, it’s hard to believe that so many unpleasant things went on here in the last year.	Why would a reporter feel it necessary to tell viewers that the people are “so attractive”? Is “unpleasant” an accurate way to describe “stunning violence” and families being “liquidated”?
- <i>Ya, but now Bali becomes more beautiful without communists.</i> - What actually happened here in this village? - <i>Some of the communist leaders from this village realized that they did wrong already, and they came to village council and ask when the village council will cleanse their village from the communist people.</i> - You mean the communists themselves asked to be killed? - <i>Some of them. And some of them wanted to be killed, and now give me a chance to say goodbye to all of my relatives, and the next morning I’m ready to be killed.</i>	Why would this official assume that others would accept his explanation as credible? What else might the reporter have asked?
Indonesia has fabulous potential wealth in natural resources. Goodyear Sumatra rubber empire is an example.	If Indonesia is rich in natural resources, why isn’t the nation as a whole wealthy? Where does money go when a foreign company like Goodyear controls a natural resource like rubber?
The rubber workers union was communist run, so after the coup many of them were killed or imprisoned. Some of the survivors—you see them here—still work the rubber, but this time as prisoners. And at gunpoint.	How is it possible that an American company used and profited from slave labor with impunity? Should Goodyear be required to pay reparations?
A different island deals with communist survivors in various ways. In some camps they’re starved to death, or released periodically to be killed by local citizens.	Why is the world allowing atrocities to continue? Given what you know about the events of 1965-1966, what’s missing from this report?
Ted Yates, NBC News, reporting.	