Nine Armenians

WHAT’S HAPPENING, WHERE IT’S HAPPENING AND WHO IT’S HAPPENING TO

“No one in my family considered the events of Armenia’s recent nightmare a reality

suitable for conversation or knowledge. The scalding facts of the Genocide had been buried, consigned to a deeper layer of consciousness, only to erupt in certain odd moments, as when my grandmother told me a story or a dream. What my parents did, often in unconscious and instinctual ways, was to make sure that my brother and sisters and I were Americans first. Free, unhampered, unaunted, unscarred by the unspeakable cruelties of Armenian history.”

WHAT AND WHERE:

“Once there was and never was,” my grandmother’s stories began, the way all Armenian fairy tales began:— “2

Nine Armenians tells the story of three generations of an Armenian-American family in 1992. The play is an affectionate tribute to the courage of those who fled genocide and came to America in order to embark upon a new life. They are an ebullient, quarrelsome, but thoroughly appealing family whose conversation is lively, loving and laughable, though tainted with the sorrow of unhealed historical scars.

NIGHTMARE continued on page 12
The Republic of Armenia is a landlocked country in southwestern Russia between the Black and Caspian seas. It is bordered on the north by Georgia, on the east by Azerbaijan, on the south by Iran and on the west by Turkey. The capital is Yerevan. The Armenian Republic has an average altitude of 5,600 feet with a dry climate. The summers are hot; the winters are extremely cold, but, despite the harsh climate, the volcanic soil is very fertile and delicious figs, apricots, grapes and peaches are grown. Copper and molybdenum are mined in the Kajaran area; a chemical industry is concentrated in Yerevan. Hydroelectric power is used to produce some electricity, but Armenia is dependent for its energy needs on petroleum imports. Unfortunately, supplies of oil were cut off in 1992 because of strained relations with the neighboring state of Azerbaijan.

According to the Bible, Noah’s Ark landed on Mt. Ararat in the region of Armenia now controlled by Turkey. To this day, Armenians call Ararat “Masis” and it is a symbol of national pride for them. Historians believe the Armenians first settled at the foothills of Mt. Ararat during the 7th century BC. The ancient kingdom of Urartu, a loose confederation of tribes, also settled on the fertile plain of Van and in the broad Araxes Valley thought by some authors to be the Garden of Eden. They built magnificent aqueducts, some still in use today. Under Tigranes I, who came to power in 95 BC, the Armenian state reached its greatest expansion, extending from Georgia in the north into Mesopotamia and Syria in the south. The Romans defeated Tigranes in 66 BC and ruled Armenia at various times until the 1400s AD. During this period, Arabs, Mongols, Persians, Turks and other groups fought the Romans for control.

About 300 AD, under Tiridates III, Armenians became the first nation to accept Christianity. Christianization led to the development of a unique Armenian culture, a blend of Greek and Iranian influence. In the early fifth century, the churchman, Saint Mesrop, devised an alphabet for the Armenian language. Under the Byzantine rule of the time, literacy and intellectual life flourished; the Bible was translated and the first university was established. The capital, Ani, a city of 40 gates and 1001 churches, became the heart of Armenia. The beautiful black stone crosses (Khachkars) became a religious symbol for the Armenians.

In the fifth and sixth centuries, Armenia was nominally subject to the Byzantine emperor, but the country was actually controlled by native clan leaders known as “nakharar.” Much of this medieval history was marked by disunity, divisions and periodic invasions. In 640 AD, the Muslim Arabs invaded Armenia and captured Dvin, its principal town. The Arabs ruled Armenia until the 11th century when it was re-conquered first by the Byzantines and then by the Seijurk Turks. The Ottoman Turks seized control in the 16th century and Armenia remained under Ottoman rule for the next 400 years.
Under Ottoman rule, the Armenians were governed by a patriarch of the Armenian church who lived in Istanbul and was responsible to the Ottoman sultan. Armenian society was dominated by wealthy bankers and businessmen—the sarrafs and amiras; culture and literature were maintained by the church until a revival of national consciousness in the 19th century.

With the annexation of Persian Armenia by Russia in 1828, the influence of Western ideas and the Ottoman oppression, Armenian intellectuals developed a new interest in the Armenian past. They began to acquire a Western sense of nationality, a feeling of kinship with Christian Europe and a growing alienation from the Muslim people among whom they lived. This led to the formation of revolutionary political parties, the Hnchaks and the Dashnaks. The Ottoman government reacted severely to instances of Armenian resistance. The Turks did not merely fight the armed rebels, they massacred women and children and burned villages. Though this policy of massacre, which reached its peak in the mass killings of 1894-96, concerned European diplomats about the “Armenian question,” little was done by any government to intervene or protect Armenians.

Just before World War I, the Ottoman government experienced a series of political and military defeats in its empire. They experienced a loss of territory, which forced a migration of Turks into Armenia. In 1913, the government was taken over by young Turkish officers led by Enver Pasha and Talaat Pasha. In 1914, they joined the German-Ottoman alliance while Armenia was still the protectorate of Russia. Thus, the Turks and Armenians were allied to opposite sides at the beginning of World War I.

Enver Pasha led a huge army against Russian forces on the eastern front. At first, he was dramatically victorious, but he and his troops were not prepared for the harsh winters in the Armenian highlands. In 1915, the Russians, accompanied by Armenian volunteers, pushed the Turkish army back. A disastrous defeat followed in which Enver lost three-fourths of his army. Armenians in the Turkish army fled to Russian territories. The Turks then deported the Armenians. In Turkey, it was clear that the purpose of the deportation was to ensure total annihilation of the Armenians, not national security. Tens of thousands were sent barefoot and almost naked into the deserts and the mountains, most of them dying from fatigue, starvation, thirst, or the savagery of accompanying guards. The survivors were shot, drowned or axed when they reached the desert. Nearly two million Armenians perished.

German and American governmental archives show the staggering efficiency of the forced marches, the massacres and the eventual starvation of the survivors in the Syrian desert. Henry Morgenthau, American ambassador to the Ottoman empire, tried to appeal to Turkish reason. He wrote of his confrontation with Enver Pasha and Talaat Pasha in which they said: “Our Armenian policy is absolutely fixed—and nothing can change it. We will not have Armenians anywhere. They can live in the desert but nowhere else.” In the atmosphere of surprise, haste and confusion of the first World War, “the first genocide of modern times” was committed.

For the destitute survivors stranded in Syria and elsewhere, the Treaty of Lausanne signed in 1923 between the Western powers and the Nationalist government came as the final declaration that the Armenians stood alone in the world. It extended formal recognition to the Republic of Turkey, which implied the sealing of the borders to the Armenians. The international community reached an agreement with Turkey that banned deported Armenians from returning to their rightful homes. The survivors finally realized that the deportations now meant permanent exile from their Armenian homeland.

“Genocide is like bacteriological warfare in that it goes beyond its effects. As a result of countenancing crime against humanity, it is humanity which sooner or later, without recourse condemns itself.”

A COMPARISON OF THE ARMEÑIAN GENOCIDE AND THE HOLOCAUST:

“After all, who remembers the Armenians?”
—Adolf Hitler attributed remark, prior to the invasion of Poland, 1939.

In his book, The History of the...
“In Germany, the Nazis first came for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak up because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Trade Unionist. Then they came for ME... by that time there was no one to speak up for anyone.”

—Martin Niemoller, from his statements made during his visit to the U.S. in 1946

process for young Armenian males that generally resulted in execution. In the Jewish case, the Enabling Acts of 1933 and the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 excluded Jews from official positions, certain professions and economic activities. The Jews were also required to wear the Star of David as identification and this labeling reduced them to the status of “outlaws.” These preludes to genocide were entered into cautiously and gradually to test public opinion and interest. The Nazis began a massive relocation (the Madagascar Plan); the Turks commenced with a mass arrest and relocation (the Madagascar Plan); the Nazis began a massive relocation (the Madagascar Plan); the Turks commenced with a mass arrest

In Dadrian’s formula for genocide, an opportunity structure must be present. In the case of the Armenians, it was World War I; for the Jews, it was World War II. Indeed, the nature of warfare is such that it encourages legislative authority to subside and executive power to increase by granting emergency powers and giving “security forces” levels of authority that allow unchecked abusive behavior. Genocide not only requires opportunistic decisions, but its execution depends on functional efficiency. The goal is optimal destruction at minimal cost for which the military plays the most crucial role.

In the case of Armenia, the Turks suspended their Parliament, introduced a system of temporary laws which allowed for a launching of mass arrests and initiated a conscription

oppression. In 1935, two British officials who were negotiating with German officials from the Economic Ministry regarding the emigration of German Jews to Palestine, expressed their concern about the future of Jews in Germany. One of them, Eric Mills, wrote in a private letter: “The fate of German Jews is a tragedy for which cold, intelligent planning by those in authority takes rank—with the elimination of the Armenians from the Turkish empire.”

Before the invasion of Poland, on August 22, 1939, Hitler urged his military officers to be brutal and merciless. He stated: “After all, who speaks of the destruction of the Armenians?” And as early as 1931 in a secret interview with Richard Breitling, the editor of the German daily Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten, Hitler remarked: “Everywhere people are awaiting a new world order. We intend to introduce a great resettlement policy—think of the biblical deportations and massacres of the Middle Ages—and remember the extermination of the Armenians.”

The series of mistakes and the failure on the part of the European victors in World War I rendered the Armenian genocide impervious to both prevention and punishment. The failure of justice in this case prompted the Allies to employ different methods at the Nuremberg trials following World War II. The Tribunal paved the way for the affirmation of crimes against humanity as a supreme offense under international law, and Nazi perpetrators were tried and sentenced. This time the world would take notice.

Dadrian concludes that “the future tasks of national and international law as they relate to genocide as a crime—is to restrain human behavior under a system of sanctions or legal consequences.—(as Aristotle said) some 23 centuries ago: When separated from law and justice man is the worst of animals.”
A visit with Sosi Bocchieriyan

August 15, 1997

Sosi Bocchieriyan was raised in Istanbul, Turkey

where she went to an Armenian primary school and then an English high school. Her mother was the headmistress of a school and her father was a self-employed architect, a proud profession for Armenians. Sosi came to the USA in 1977; her parents followed three years later.

Sosi’s grandfather on her father’s side survived the genocide—the rest of his family was slaughtered. Armenians call the genocide the “chart”—the butchery. Because they lived as an oppressed minority in Turkey, they didn’t talk about the atrocity and suppressed conversation about it. Sosi feels that is one reason people know little or nothing about the Armenian genocide. That fact, plus the Turks’ refusal to take responsibility for the mass killings and historians’ repeated neglect of the event, account for the general ignorance. “If people knew, the crying would increase,” says Sosi.

Sosi’s kitchen reflects her Armenian heritage. When asked what she cooks, she replied: “The traditional Armenian dishes. No fast food, no junk food. Everything is fresh, fresh, fresh.”

Sosi feels the situation in Armenia is very bleak today. The blockade by the Turks and the Azerbaijanis and the fall of Russian Communism have resulted in miserable conditions—no fuel oil, electricity, food. Since it is a land-locked country (and blockaded), it is rare that any aid reaches Armenia.

Two things are important to Sosi and all Armenians. First, they want an apology from Turkey and an acknowledgment of their guilt. Secondly, they want people to know that if the Armenian genocide had been punished, the second one (the Jews) might not have happened. Most of all, she feels the solution to all this mass killing, wherever it is happening, lies in the Armenian word girargel—to have the law and to enforce it.

Sosi invites us all to the annual commemoration of the Armenian Genocide on April 24, Armenian Martyrs Day.

“They fell like tears and never knew what for In that summer of strife of massacre and war Their only crime was life; their only guilt was being The children of Armenia Nothing less, nothing more.”

—Charles Aznavour, “They Fell”
The Armenian Diaspora

“The deep unutterable woe
Which none save exiles feel.”
—William Edmondstoune Aytoun.
The Island of the Scots (1849) st. 12

“Diaspora” comes from the ancient Greek root *speiro* which means “to sow seed.” Its passive voice meant “to be scattered” and can be used to describe both things and people. The word was first used in this sense in Greek by Thucydides in his History of the Peloponnesian War when he described the expulsion of the Aeginetan people by the Athenians. Some settled in the land of Thyrea; others were scattered about throughout the rest of Greece. The American Heritage Dictionary defines it as the aggregate of Jews or Jewish communities living outside of Palestine and dispersed among the Gentiles after the capture of the Holy Land by the Babylonians. From these citations, the classical sense of the term “diaspora” is that of a people physically forced from their homeland, which then comes under foreign domination. This is clearly the situation in which the Armenians find themselves.

The existence of a diaspora implies the existence of a homeland. This is complicated by the fact that once victims of diaspora settle elsewhere, the process of integration, acculturation and assimilation begins. This can result in tensions and frustrations about a new national identity, culture and language. The clash of the old and the new, the traditional and modern arise. “What diasporas do assert—is the role and importance of the national idea in resisting assimilation. Diasporas look to return to an original homeland from which they have been collectively expelled by physical force or uprooted because of economic necessity.”

Diasporas tend to cling to the idea of the lost nation in order to preserve themselves as culturally distinct entities within their new, adopted home.

Forced to earn their way in lands where they arrived as foreigners, the Armenians fell silent as they were unable to communicate their grief about their tragedies. In turn they faced the silence of the world that preferred to ignore them and their fate. We can witness this behavior in the nine Armenians of the play. Non and Vartan harbor the memories of the old country, both bitter and sweet, and wish to pass them on to their children and grandchildren. John, Armine, Louise and Garo have become more Americanized but still respect the past and practice the traditions of their parents. Raffi and Ginya, though respectful of their elders, are definitely third generation and, as children, are thoroughly steeped in the New World culture. It is up to Ani, the sensitive college student, to bridge the gap between generations by the journey she makes and to break the years of silence.

In the play, the characters are always carrying or wearing coats; is this a metaphor for leaving the land again, either to return to Armenia or another dreaded expulsion? Or are they more like the bird who is resigned to building a nest out of anything, but in a new tree?

“America was one vast foster home.”

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WORDS AND PHRASES

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PROVENIENT ARMENIANS

William Saroyan novelist and playwright
Rouben Mamoulian play producer and film director
Gary Kasparov chess champion
Dr. Varaztd Kazanjian famous plastic surgeon
George Deukmejian former Governor of California

Arlene Francis(Kazanjian) television personality
Mike Conners (Krekor Ohanian) Mannix of TV show Mannix
Kirk Kerkorian airline and real estate magnate; owned MGM studios
Ara Parseghian football coach at Notre Dame, 1963-74
Alex Manoogian industrialist and philanthropist
Lucine Amara opera singer
Arshile Gorky abstract expressionist artist
Aram Khatchaturian composer
Alan Hovhaness composer
Michael Arlen (Dikran Kouyoumdjian) writer in the 1920s and 30s

“We live as one nation—as Armenians. Outside of that, we are an asset to every nation.”
—Alex Manoogian
Food for us was a complex cultural emblem, an encoded script that embodied the long history and collective memory of our Near Eastern culture. I didn’t know that eating also was a drama whose meaning was entwined in Armenia’s bitter history. In 1960, I hadn’t even heard the phrase “starving Armenians,” nor did I know that my ancestors were among the more than two million Armenians who, if they weren’t killed outright, were marched into the deserts of Turkey in 1915 and left to starve as they picked the seeds out of feces or sucked the blood on their own clothes. In 1960, I was unaware of the morality play of the dinner table, but I was aware of how irritatingly intense my parents were becoming about the propriety and ritual of dining.”

In her 1993 book Armenian-Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian, Anny Bakalian contrasts “being” with “feeling” Armenian in the United States. She stresses that the family is the unit that reproduces new Armenians, educates them and persuades them to “be” Armenian and continue the nation. “Being” Armenian, in this sense, means speaking Armenian, supporting the Apostolic church, being acquainted with Armenian history and literature, and having an active concern for the larger Armenian community or nation. As a group, the characters in the play are “being” an Armenian family.

Besides concern for their own immediate family, the Armenians consider the extended family or khnamiie important. Khnamiie (Armenians do not like the word “in-laws”) implies a relationship of families with each other, not just the relationship of the newly married couples with two sets of parents. Khnamiie will make an effort to overlook political and other differences and include each other in their social circles if they live in the same communities.

Until the mid-20th century, Armenian family life was considered patriarchal and the father’s rule, authoritarian. However, with deportation, war and emigration, many Armenian families were broken apart and regrouped. The physical survival of the family became the only important issue and, in many cases, this was left up to the women because the men had been killed or imprisoned. The picture of Armenian women as possessing strong inner will and character while showing a modest face to the outside world is shown clearly in Non, Armine and Ani in the play.

Arménians share a collective memory of massacres and deportations, but the subject is rarely discussed. Instead, it is internalized and absorbed, removed from family attitudes and schooling. The feeling is that the loss should not be forgotten and those who have survived should achieve as much as possible as a way of trying to fill the gap left by the loss of so many people. Therefore, the notion of sacrifice for family and nation is very strong and imparts a sense of urgency. There is a need to achieve as much as possible while the opportunity is there. For some this takes the form of earning as much money as possible; for others, a pursuit of education for themselves or their children, especially in the professions. Education and money are seen as ensuring mobility—should it ever become necessary.

At the same time, Armenians believe life is to be enjoyed and lived to the fullest. Hospitality, the constant visiting and keeping in touch, is a basic part of Armenian family life, as is the demonstration of affection—the hugs, kisses, touching, etc. Hospitality also includes one of the most powerful symbols of Armenian life: food. Armenian cuisine is a very old one...
Activities

CULTURE

“In the broadest sense, it refers to all distinctively human activities and includes achievements in every field, which man passes on from one generation to the next. Culture means such activities as using a language, getting married, bringing up children, earning a living, running a government, fighting a war and taking part in religious ceremonies. In a narrower sense, we refer to a culture as the sum total of the ways of life of a group of people.”

—The World Book Encyclopedia
Volume 4

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Develop an Original Culture Activity

■ Choose a time period (ancient or modern) for the beginning of your group.
■ Research the period and define the ideas, knowledge and available technology that would affect your group.
■ Define your groups’ home, original country or place (describe environment, climate, natural resources, geography (which continent where in continent) and animals.
■ Are you isolated (is your group alone or do you live among or regularly encounter other cultures) through trade, war, etc.? 
■ What is the name of your culture.
■ Did your people migrate from one place to another?
■ When did you migrate?
■ What time period?
■ How long had your group been in existence?
■ Why did you migrate? (split in group, depleted natural resources, heard of a better place, forced out because of climate changes or natural disaster, or competition with another group that moved in?)
■ What did you value before the migration, what did you treasure and respect in your pre-migration period.
■ Who was your leader (religious, military, government official, educator, scientist, businessperson, artist)?
■ How did you migrate? Write and illustrate the story of your migration.
■ What mountains, rivers, deserts, oceans, swamps, forest, jungles, and glaciers and solar systems did you cross?
■ What trade, battles, or uniting with other groups did you participate in?
■ If you joined another group what skills, knowledge and strengths did you bring to the new group and what did they bring? Include how far you migrated and over what time period (years, decades, generations).
■ Did your group change during the migration?
■ What did you value after the migration; what did you treasure and respect in your post-migration period?
■ Who was your leader? (religious, military, government official, educator, scientist, businessperson, artist?)
■ What were your modes of transportation?
■ Where is your new home located?
■ Name the continent or system.
■ Where on the continent or system?
■ Describe the natural resources, geographical landmarks and give a description of the climate.

Your culture

■ Describe your religion. What do you worship, value and honor?

ACTIVITIES continued on page 9

FOOD continued from page 7

and excavations of ancient Urartuan and Armenian sites reveal that the people had a well-developed agricultural system. Domestic fowl and animals were raised; wheat, rye, barley were cultivated; dairy products such as butter, cheese, milk and yogurt were important; and herbs and spices were used. In the play the family eats such dishes as: 

Tass kebob lamb stew
Baklava a light flaky pastry filled with ground nuts and served with syrup
Kata a flaky breakfast pastry.
Dolmas vegetables or fruit stuffed with meat
Annoushabour a pudding made with whole grains, honey, nuts and raisins
Basterma dried beef squares
Cheese Berregg a many-layered pastry with cheese filling
Sarma stuffed leaves such as grape, cabbage or chard

Americans also eat lavash (flat bread), hummus(chick pea dip), shish kebab(skewered barbecued lamb), and pilaf (steamed, seasoned rice)

Pari Akhorjhag! (Bon appetit!)

“——-(The Coffee House) was frequented by Armenians, but others came, too. All who remembered the old country. All who loved it. All who had played tavli and the card game scambile in the old country. All who enjoyed the food of the old country, the wine and the small cups of coffee in the afternoons. All who loved the songs and the stories. And all who liked to be in a place with a familiar smell, thousands of miles from home.”
traits on that theme. For example: for one theme and do a series of por-
themes. Then combine all movements through the list of problems, or
part of the group be the mover

need to be touching at least one

and freeze in the same pose, but fol-

ber is the leader and when the por-
mirror and portraits. One mem-

Have them experiment also by com-

clapping his hands and calling out a

Have one student be the changer, by

sions for the groups to be ready to

movement. It will take several ses-
tions and let them

Next, have students share their work

with each other. Finally, make the

following assignment and let them

work on it by listening to each oth-
ers’ music in their group. They need
to pick their theme and music and
then work as a group to decide on

movement. It will take several ses-
sions for the groups to be ready to

perform for each other. Some groups
may have a hard time working

together and may have to let some-

one be the ultimate decision maker.

SIDECOACH: Go from group to group

observing and giving ideas. Talk to
each group about how they might use
portraits and the combination of por-
traits and mirror in their assignment
to music that they will be working on
next.

Next, have students share their work

with each other. Finally, make the

following assignment and let them

work on it by listening to each oth-
ers’ music in their group. They need
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HIGH SCHOOL

“The ancient Greek philosopher
Socrates asked a question which has
echoed ever after: how should one
live? The question calls for deep and
transforming reflection on ourselves
as individuals. Anthropologists ask a
related question: how do we live
together? This seems to set out a
different array of problems.... [for
instance ] What is done?25

’... human beings, in contrast to
other social animals do not just live
in society, they produce society in
order to live’ ... We cannot know our-
selves without knowing others.”16

Questions:

■ What does the term cultural diver-
sity mean?

■ How are cultures diverse?
P
possible answers: languages, domestic
arrangements, religious institutions,
psychological ideas, cosmological
persuasions, dress, means of livelihood,
political organization, differences in
social and cultural life, foods and food
preparation.

■ What set of capacities do human
beings have [that animals do not]
that make it possible to be culturally
diverse?
Possible answer: adaptability. “This
variety [of cultures] reveals the plas-
ticity of humankind. Such plasticity,
the capacity to be formed by the life
of the society into which one is born,
is the single most important human
universal, the decisive trait that sep-

arates human from animal. It presup-
poses a quality of mind, an ability to
learn, and other capacities such as
speech, which have no clear counter-
part among other species. So the
sheer fact of cultural diversity com-
prises in itself a sufficient proof for
human uniqueness.”17

■ Is it possible for people from one
culture to really understand another
culture and at least to forge a work-
ing understanding?

■ How do settlers, visitors, converts
(willing and unwilling) manage?

■ How does the younger generation
manage?

■ What (if any) are common traits
of human beings regardless of their
culture?

■ How does diversity come about?
(See elementary exercise above for
ideas.)
Diverse means different, dissimilar,
unlike, disparate, incomparable.

■ If the ability to be diverse means
that human beings are adaptable and
can learn to adjust and accommo-
date, what is in our nature that
makes it difficult to accept those that are different from ourselves?

■ What must happen for human beings to accept and delight in differences rather than suspect them?

Create a Dot-Free Society Activity

Tell the class that the goal of the exercise is to create a dot-free society. It is every member of the class' goal to be a member of this society.

1. Have enough scraps of paper for the class.
2. On no more than 30% of these papers, place a small dot and fold. Ask each student to draw a slip of paper.

After everyone has a slip of paper, the students are, through interaction (conversation, questions) among their classmates, to create a “dot free” group. Stop when the class thinks it has achieved a “dot free” group.

DOTS:
■ Decide whether or not to hide the fact that you are a dot. Decide whether or not you are proud of your dot.

Discussion and observation after the completion of the exercise:
■ How did it feel to have a dot or not to have a dot?
■ How did it feel to be excluded from the group because of something beyond your control?
■ How did the non-dot group treat the dots?
■ Did the dots group?
■ If you could choose not to be a dot would you?
■ Did any leaders appear in either group?
■ Does this happen in our society?
■ How does this relate to the play *Nine Armenians* and to the Jewish Holocaust?

Teacher’s observation:
1. Map out what is going on: grouping, leaders, those that hide dot, those that flaunt dot, those that aggressively seek out dots.

Silent Tension Activity

Students pair off and agree upon an environment, characters and conflict. The conflict needs to be so full of tension that the characters cannot speak. There will be no dialog during this scene as a result. After playing in pairs, have them play in small groups with other situations. Students should not discuss the whole scenario and how it will turn out. They should only decide the three parts and then let the scenario develop.

Example: Environment-restaurant, Characters: Two sweethearts.
Conflict: Have just broken their engagement.

Have the actors play complete give-and-take, with only one moving at a time. The tension will even become more evident.
SIDE COACH: “Communicate the environment through movement; communicate the tension and emotions through movement, eye contact, give and take focus, think of motion give and take. This game usually is highly dramatic. Coach them to solve the problem, the tension, somehow. It may end up being a scream, a laugh, a line. Don’t tell them this, but let them discover that the tension becomes so real that often a line or noise is the only way to relieve the tension.”
Notes
2. der Hovanessian, p. 87.
3. Hagopian, p. 201.
5. Ternon, p. 12.
6. Ternon, p. 12.

Sources

Further Reading
The play centers on the decision of Ani, the college-aged daughter of John and Armine, to visit Armenia after the death of her grandfather, Vartan. In the last days of his life, the old man, who had founded a church in his native country, had vacillated between living in the nightmares of his past and being concerned about a future in which his descendants will know nothing of their cultural history.

Though her parents are uncertain about Ani’s journey, her grandmother Non has a special reason to encourage Ani to go even though conditions in Armenia are still disturbing. In letters home, Ani bears witness to a tragedy that happened in Armenia over 80 years ago and from which Armenia has never fully recovered. It becomes clear that she is uncovering a bleak, savage heritage that her older relatives have kept in silence. As close as the family members are, each has his/her own self protective way of dealing with the knowledge that life anywhere can be terribly tenuous.

“When we have no country, we must live as best we can, and our people must be grateful for this land. It is new and strange, but it has hope.”

Sally Gass, Contributing Writer