

# **Siroun:** **Finding Courage (A Virtual Reality Experience)**



## TOPIC

*Siroun:*  
Finding Courage  
(A Virtual Reality Experience)

## GRADE LEVEL

7th - 8th grade

## DURATION

30 minutes

## SUBJECT AREA

History-Social Studies,  
English Language Arts

## DESCRIPTION OF THE LESSON

*Siroun:* A Virtual Reality Experience is a universal story about one's own inner battle of finding the courage to stand up against hate. The story is set in a fictional Armenian town in the Ottoman Empire in 1915, called Siroun (meaning "beauty" in Armenian). This virtual reality experience tells of how a friendship between two young boys is pulled apart by hate.

In this activity, students will identify the concept of courage and will analyze primary and secondary sources to reflect on how individual acts of courage can have an impact on others. Students will watch both *Siroun* and audiovisual testimony of survivors of the Armenian Genocide for this analysis. By the end of this activity, students will write a reflection about their thoughts on courage and the significance of courage when standing up against hate.

This activity features clips of testimony from Armenian survivors, Haig Baronian and Khoren Davidson.

Thumbnail Image:

"Roofs of Kharpert", circa 1900s. Courtesy of Arra Avakian.

Image Provided by: Project SAVE Photograph Armenian Photograph Archives, Inc.

## STANDARDS ADDRESSED

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R1.

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W9.

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

## MATERIALS

- *Siroun: A Virtual Reality Experience* (7:21 min)
- *Student Handout Siroun- Analyzing Sources*
- Clips of testimony: Haig Baronian (1:28 min), Khoren Davidson (0:57 min)

## LEARNING AIMS

As a result of this lesson, students will...

- Identify courage and analyze primary and secondary sources to reflect on the impact of courageous acts
- Synthesize their analysis and write a reflection on how primary and secondary sources can help one recognize the importance of courage

**Siroun:****Finding Courage (A Virtual Reality Experience)****Consider****Thinking about Courage & Exploring *Siroun***

**1. Introduction:** Tell students that they will explore the concept of courage by watching both the virtual reality film, *Siroun*, and testimony from Armenian survivors. Explain that *Siroun*, though a fictional story is based on historically true events of the Armenian Genocide.

**2. Essential Questions.** Share the essential question of this activity, below, with students.

➤ How can learning about the past with primary and secondary sources help us recognize the impact of courage and courageous acts when standing up against hate?

**3. Think-Pair Share:** To begin, ask students to think about what comes to mind when they read the word “courage”. Then, have them share their responses with a partner and ask them to reflect on a time when they (or someone they know) experienced courage or demonstrated courage. See guiding questions below to support student conversations.

- What does courage mean to you?
- Where does courage come from?
- What is the most courageous act you have done or witnessed?
- Why do you think it was courageous?
- Why do you think you or the individual moved to action?

Then, have students describe the impact of their experience (and/or on another individual) with their partner. When they have finished, engage students in a whole group discussion and have them share their responses.

**4. Viewing *Siroun* (CLICK TO VIEW: 7:21 min):** Now, tell students that they will watch *Siroun*. Provide students with the *Student Handout Siroun: Analyzing Sources* and have them read the brief introduction. As students watch *Siroun*, have them think about the essential question and after complete “Part A” on the student handout by taking notes on the key details, quotes, concepts, and questions the film raises in the box. See *Student Handout Siroun: Analyzing Sources Part A*.

**5. Think-Pair Share:** Once students have watched the film, have them share what stood out to them most with a partner. Then, in a whole group discussion have students share their responses. Conclude the discussion by asking students the following:

- How does courage play a role in *Siroun*?
- What has *Siroun* helped you understand about courage and courageous acts?

**Siroun:****Finding Courage (A Virtual Reality Experience)****Collect**

**6. Investigating Testimony** Next, tell students that they will watch testimony from two Armenian survivors. Have students first read the biographies of Haig Baronian and Khoren Davidson. Then, have students view each testimony twice and respond to the connected questions in “Part B” of the *Student Handout Siroun: Analyzing Sources*. See viewing instructions for each testimony below:

- › **First Viewing** Play the clip of testimony all the way through. When done, ask students to think about what stands out to them in the testimony and have respond to the first connected question on the *Student Handout Siroun: Analyzing Sources*.
- › **Second Viewing** Play the clip a second time. For this second viewing, direct students to pay attention to his body language, voice and tone and respond to the second connected question on the *Student Handout Siroun: Analyzing Sources*.

**7. Reflection** When students have watched and analyzed both clips, have them complete 3b. Reflection on Testimony in Part B of the *Student Handout Siroun: Analyzing Sources*.

**Construct**

**8. Reflection** Ask students to think about what they have learned about courage and the impact of courageous acts from this activity. In a class discussion, have students discuss the essential question of this activity, then, have them complete Part C of the *Student Handout Siroun: Analyzing Sources*. Demonstrating courage is never easy, but its foundation lies in knowing what one stands for. More often than not, those who have performed courageous acts have done so because they held a core value, a basic or foundational personal belief that guided their lives and enabled them to stand up for what was right.

**Communicate**

**9. Discussion** To close this lesson, have students share their reflections and share what surprised them from Siroun and the testimonies they heard. Students may also share their response to the essential question.

**Additional Note to Teacher:**

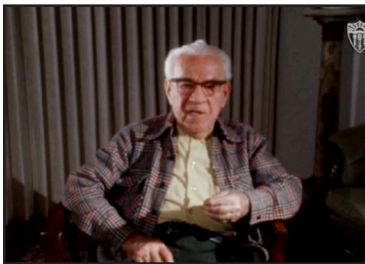
To ensure students have background knowledge of the Armenian Genocide, you may use the following sources in IWitness.

- › “Connections Video: “What is the Armenian Genocide?”
- › Brief Histories: The Armenian Genocide, 1915-1923

**Siroun:****Finding Courage (A Virtual Reality Experience)****Biographies:**

**Haig Baronian** was born in 1908 in Bayburt, Turkey in the Erzurum province of the Ottoman Empire. In June 1915, Haig remembers that all Armenians were exiled from his town. Nine members of his family joined the deportation caravans leading to the Syrian desert. Along the way, Haig was abducted by an who wanted him for a son. After an edict was issued to hand over Armenian children to the government, Haig was taken and put in a prison (formerly an Armenian home). Once enough Armenians were collected, Haig was sent toward

Kemah Gorge, a dangerous spot along the Euphrates River, to be killed. During this march toward the river, Haig was saved by a relative of the Turkish gendarme who had abducted him. Shortly after he was taken away again and placed in another holding prison. Haig was later taken in by a wealthy Turkish family who raised him with a Turkish identity. This family would give Haig away to another Turkish family, who he would stay with until the end of the First World War. After the war, Haig was found by an Armenian woman who would eventually help Haig get to an orphanage in Merzifon (Amasya, Turkey) with other Armenian children. Haig immigrated to the United States in the 1920s. He was interviewed on November 30, 1984 in Northridge, California.



**Khoren Davidson** was born on December 26, 1896 in Suleymanli (Kahramanmaras, Turkey) formerly known as Zeitoun. In 1909, he attended St. Paul's College in Tarsus to pursue his medical studies. In 1915, Khoren could no longer attend school and was forcibly deported along with other Armenians from the region. Along deportation routes he witnessed ruthless crimes committed by Ottoman Turkish gendarmes and escaped unbearable conditions in concentration camps three times but would continuously be arrested and deported again.

His life was spared when skillful workers were being collected from deportee caravans. He would provide medical assistance to locals, however with the coming of an anti-Armenian mayor, his life was again threatened. A hoja (Muslim schoolmaster) who was Khoren's patient, convinced the mayor that Khoren was an Armenian who converted to Islam. Khoren was given a Turkish name, and he learned Islamic principles. With his new identity Khoren managed to rescue over 200 Armenian boys and girls who here kidnapped and sent them to the American Near East Relief organization in Aintab to receive aid. Khoren immigrated to the United States, returned to his Christian faith and married his wife Tilda Rajebian in 1933. He published his memoir *Odyssey of an Armenian from Zeitoun* in 1977, which was translated to English in 1985. He was interviewed on August 13, 1977 in Fresno, Ca.