

# Holodomor: The genocidal famine in Ukraine

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**IN THE MONTHS** leading up to my fall 2020 Genocide Studies 12 course, I joined an organization called Genocide Prevention

BC. This non-profit organization in Vancouver challenges racism and hate by supporting genocide prevention education in BC schools and provides a platform for intergenerational trauma advocacy.

Through Genocide Prevention BC I met an intergenerational survivor of the Holodomor. She encourages genocide studies teachers to include the Holodomor in their courses.

It felt good to reassure her that I would be teaching my students about the Holodomor. What didn't feel good, however, was acknowledging that if I hadn't been tasked with teaching a course on genocide studies, I would have been completely ignorant to the existence of the Holodomor and its Canadian memorialization dates. Why had I never learned about this genocide in my own schooling?

The Holodomor, which means "inflicted death by starvation," was a government-sanctioned famine genocide that occurred between 1932 and 1933. The Soviet Union, under the dictatorship of Joseph Stalin, forcibly collectivized 75% of farms in Ukraine and effectively brought Ukrainian villagers and their grain production under Soviet state control. Farmers who refused to comply with Stalin's collectivization plans or grain-quota laws were either robbed and thrown out of their homes, shot dead, or sent to Siberian death camps.

Starvation during the Holodomor was used as a tool to annihilate Ukrainian nationalists who openly resisted the Soviet Union's repressive communist rule. Every edible product from family homes, gardens, and farms was legally appropriated to fulfill impossibly high grain quotas set by the Soviet government. The sale of the stolen grain and foodstuffs was used to fund the

mechanization and industrial expansion of the Soviet Union.

The results were genocidal. As hunger increased, Stalin introduced ever-more draconian policies that trapped Ukrainians inside of their ransacked villages. Soviet blockades purposely prevented humanitarian food-aid from entering Ukraine. Entire villages, including elders and children, were reduced to eating tree bark, grass, rotten roots, rats, frogs, dogs, horses, and birds. In June 1933, at the height of the man-made famine genocide, 28,000 people died per day. The total number of Ukrainians who died of starvation during the Holodomor is estimated to be between four and seven million.

The final insult came in the form of five decades of denial from the world about what happened during the Soviet occupation of Ukraine. In fact, the famine genocide was denied by the world up until the fall of communism in 1991.

The Canadian government has recognized the last Friday and Saturday of November as Holodomor Memorial Day. This year, November 27, 2020, marks the date schools across the nation will commemorate one of the darkest periods in 20th century history.

My students will commemorate the Holodomor with a Genocide Memorial Tree Planting. The idea behind planting fruit trees for the Holodomor was born out of a concept known as "active hope," which views ecological and socio-historical healing and repair as something we do actively together rather than something we hope for in the future.

The Foundation for Genocide Education Canada, a non-profit that creates Canadian-recognized genocide curriculum for teachers and advocates for mandatory genocide education across Canada and the United States, informed me that no provinces in Canada mandate genocide education for students.



This is concerning. Genocide education promotes critical thinking, can prevent the radicalization of youth, teaches citizens how to recognize the signs of state-sanctioned prejudice and human rights violations, increases social connection and empathy toward other cultures, encourages respect for diversity, empowers students to act on and prevent future atrocities, and develops more informed and engaged citizens.

Perhaps you weren't planning to teach or memorialize the Holodomor this November—but don't feel it's too late! Discover the educational resources available at the Holodomor Research & Education Consortium (HREC) online at [education.holodomor.ca](http://education.holodomor.ca). There you will also find a Memorial Day pamphlet created specifically for schools as well as an application form for the HREC Educator Award for Holodomor Lesson Plan Development.

I also encourage you to visit Genocide Prevention BC and The Foundation for Genocide Education online to learn more about how these non-profits are working to support teachers to ensure we actively end genocide today and into the future. 🍀