

Learning Activity

Life in a Border Village: A Case Study

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Age	15 (Grade 9)
Time	90 min
Key question	How has the war affected different areas of life in the border village of Movses?

Life in a border village is always very different from life in a city away from the border, and those differences become much more visible during a time of war. It is the people who live here that feel the harshness of war first-hand and have to deal with military violence and an unsafe atmosphere in the very place where they live. The harshness and instability of wartime affect all age groups and concern all spheres of life, including demography, economy, education, and lifestyle. This lesson focuses on changes that have taken place in border areas of Armenia over the past three decades.

Nagorno-Karabakh was granted to Azerbaijan by the Soviet powers in 1923, and until 1991 it was an autonomous region in the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (AzSSR). While the region witnessed conflict in the early years of the twentieth century, the modern Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) conflict can be said to have started in 1988, just before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The people of Nagorno-Karabakh demanded that the region be made a part of the Armenian SSR, and made legal, constitutional moves towards achieving that aim.¹ Although the Soviet census of 1989 indicated that 77% of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh was Armenian and 21% Azerbaijani, the Armenians' wishes were rejected by both the Soviet Union and Azerbaijan; the latter eventually launched war against Nagorno-Karabakh in 1991, attacking other Armenian regions at the same time. The Republic of Nagorno-

¹ The Nagorno-Karabakh Council of People's Deputies voted in favour of uniting the region with Armenia, and a referendum was held (boycotted by the Azerbaijani population of Nagorno-Karabakh), in which an overwhelming majority voted in favour of unification with Armenia.

Karabakh was proclaimed the same year. The Armenian side won the first war, signing a ceasefire agreement in 1994. A peace treaty, however, was never signed, and military actions continued for many years thereafter. Escalations in 2016, 2020 and 2023 made the lives of ordinary people in the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh and in the bordering villages of Armenia unbearable. As a result of the most recent escalation in September 2023, Nagorno-Karabakh was forced to accept the rule of Azerbaijan because of severe losses.

During this lesson, students will analyse primary and secondary sources, working in groups, each of which will focus on one sphere of life and will cover a part of the conflict period. The groups will also assess the influence of the war on a given age group: children, youth, adults, or older people. Through a world café activity, students will comment on one another's work and offer suggestions for improvement. Teachers are encouraged to present and explain peer assessment criteria to the students in order to get constructive criticism from other groups. The homework will be a reasoned essay on the changes in the life of a border village during wartime, viewed from the perspective of one age group of their choice. The lesson is a case study of Movses village in the Tavush region of Armenia.

Learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Compare and contrast primary sources and, based on them, discover and describe the main changes in the lives of people living in the conflict border area.
- Explain the impact of war from the point of view of direct participants, thereby developing empathy towards them.
- Assess the impact of conflicts on people's lives, and form personal opinions.

Pedagogical recommendations

For a successful lesson, students are expected to be familiar with the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and the general events of the period 1988 to 2023. To provide essential background to the conflicts, at the beginning of the lesson the teacher will hand out a short introductory text covering the events of 1988 to 2023.

The lesson is a case study of life in a border village in Armenia. Hence, the teacher will need to use a variety of primary and secondary sources to promote critical thinking among the students and to encourage unbiased and well-supported conclusions.

For well-organised group work and successful in-group cooperation, teachers are encouraged to form balanced groups at the start of the lesson, taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of each student.

After Stage II (discussion, analysis and preparation of their materials), students are expected to walk around and comment on the work of their peers from other groups (Stage III). 'World café' is a technique that needs to be clearly explained to the students to avoid chaos. To ensure that all work is done within a set amount of time, teachers are encouraged to use simple timers (available online).

For the peer assessment activity to be successful, the teacher should present the criteria of success before the group work begins so that the students are certain of the requirements. See Appendix II for the peer assessment criteria; peer assessment is part of Stage III.

Teachers are encouraged to organise the class discussion (Stage IV) in the spirit of equal participation and to ensure that each student has the opportunity to speak up.

Activities

Stage I

Greeting

5 minutes

Stage II

Group work

40 minutes

Students are divided into 4 groups based on the sphere of life they will analyse:

- Demography
- Economy
- Education
- Lifestyle

All groups are handed out a short introduction to the conflict. After studying it, the groups start working on the main sources. The groups are given a selection of sources (Appendix I) representing all three decades of Armenian independence and the duration of the active conflict (1991-2023). The sources contain information on the demography, economy, education, and lifestyle of Movses. Each group studies all the given sources. They make conclusions on changes to life in the village during the period and write down their findings on their posters.

Stage III

World café

25 minutes

A world café activity is conducted. All the posters are hung on the wall, and the groups of students are asked to take a walk around the classroom, spending 5 minutes at each poster, acquainting themselves with its contents and writing suggestions on sticky notes. They will use the peer assessment criteria (Appendix II). The suggestions can be both questions about the topic and improvements the students deem necessary.

After finishing work on one poster, students move to the next one.

The groups will spend 20 minutes examining the posters of other groups, and then a further five minutes to make quick improvements on their own posters based on the suggestions of their peers.

Stage IV

Class discussion

20 minutes

There is a class discussion on the key question. Already acquainted with the changes in each sphere of life, students discuss the overall changes in the village of Movses throughout the period, thus answering the key question.

Assessment

As noted above, peer assessment will be used during the lesson. The students will be given criteria (See Appendix II) to assess the work of the other groups and to make constructive suggestions.

Homework

The homework will be a reasoned essay answering the key question (see above) from the perspective of the group of people of their choice: children, youth, adults, or older people.

Glossary

Autonomous region – an area of a country that has a degree of autonomy or freedom from an external authority, e.g. Nagorno-Karabakh in Soviet Azerbaijan.

Aygepar – a border village in Armenia neighbouring the village Movses.

Berd – a community and district in north-eastern Armenia where the village Movses is located.

Dost – a person who is close to, and committed to, another; a related person or nation.

Paros system – the system of state financial support to people in need in the Republic of Armenia.

Source packs

Group 1 Demography

Source A The population of Shamshadin (currently Berd) district, including Movses, 1989

Nationality	Number	Percentage
Armenians	32,820	99.5%
Russians	66	0.2%
Azerbaijanis	55	0.2%
Ukrainians	13	0.1%
Yazidis	10	0.1%
Other	21	0.1%
Total	32,985	100%

Source: '1989 Census of the USSR', *National Statistics Committee*, Yerevan.

Source B Ararat Avalyan, head of Movses, speaks about the villagers, 19 May 2014

By 2014, the long-running conflicts had driven many young people away from Movses, leaving a village population of which over half were pensioners. In May 2014, the Movses village head spoke about this situation, speculating on whether the young people would ever return, and who might fund the development of local communities in anticipation of/to encourage any such return.

“I don't know if people who have left will return or not. What conditions should we create in order to encourage those who left to return? Maybe if peace is established, the state will use military expenses for the development of communities? Today, the people make demands of the government, not taking into account that this country is really at war. Indeed, military spending is high. They feel that only in one case – when our people retaliate against the Azerbaijanis – will people be happy. After peace is established, some will come back: for the love of their home, their birthplace, their homeland, their country, to be there for their parents.”

Source: Hakobyan, T (2014) 'The Village of Movses in the Enemy's Palm', *Civilnet News Agency*, 19 May, <http://tinyurl.com/488d9z5v>, accessed 10 October 2023.

Source C

Demography of Movses, 2016

Total inhabitants	1905
Female	1022
Male	883
Including:	
Pensioners	685
Schoolchildren	125
0–6-year-olds	62
Orphans	8
Disabled children	6
Veterans of the Great Patriotic War (WWII)	5

Source: Mikayelyan, H. (2017) *Societal Perceptions of the Conflict in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh*, Caucasus Institute: Yerevan.

The village has 928 households, 52 of which are included in the Paros system.

Source D

'The school of the village Movses will have 122 students this year, once it had 1200', 25 August 2016

Source: Hakobyan, T. (2016) 'The school of the village Movses will have 122 students this year, once it had 1200', *Civilnet News Agency*, 25 August, <http://tinyurl.com/mr45yk77>, accessed 10 October 2023.

"This September 1, 122 students will go to school in the border village of Movses. Two years ago, the number of students in this school was more than 160. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, this school had 1,200 students. Within the past 40-45 years, the number of students at Movses school has decreased tenfold."

Source E

Population of Berd district as of 1 January 2022

Source: Berdcity.am (2023) 'ID of The Berd Community of Tavush Region of The Republic of Armenia', <https://www.berdcity.am/Pages/CustomPage/?CustomPageID=722b890c-cc0b-4c5d-bdf2-30fbeb4291>, accessed 10 October 2023.

Overall population	31,695
Nationality	Armenian
Number of registered births	2,953
Number of deaths	2,084
Number of households	40,057
Number of pensioners	4,958

Source F

'What Children in Border Villages Dream about', 17-year-old girl from Movses, 19 July 2015

Source: Hakobyan, A. (2015) 'What Children in Border Villages Dream About', *BlogNews News Agency*, https://blognews.am/arm/news/287709/?fb_comment_id=863533820404460_865707523520423, 19 July, accessed 10 October 2023.

"It doesn't matter what happens. The most important thing is peace; peace and the growth of the population of the village. We, our fathers and mothers, maintain the border just like the soldiers. Our fathers and brothers should not leave Armenia to find work. And if there are many of us and we don't leave the village, you know, the enemy will stay where he is and he won't even think of crossing the border..."

Source G

A 40-year-old woman from Movses, Tavush region, Armenia

Source: Mikayelyan, H. (2017) *Societal Perceptions of the Conflict in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh*, Caucasus Institute: Yerevan, p.6.

"It is not true that our children are nervous because of shelling. The kindergarten has been renovated, and now no shots can be heard from inside it. If the children are outside and hear shots, they go inside. An additional wall is being built in front of the kindergarten to protect it from bullets. Our children are fine, happy, and well fed. The Armenian Foundation provides the kindergarten with food, furniture, and everything we need."

YOUR TASK

Analyse the given sources and make a poster answering the following questions.

- 1 What changes did the demographic profile of Movses undergo in 1989-2022? Pay attention to the following areas:
 - a Population size,
 - b Gender and age composition,
 - c Birth and death ratio
 - d Ethnicity.
- 2 According to the sources and your knowledge of the conflict, what factors influenced the change in the demographic profile of Movses?

Group 2 Economy

Source A

A 60-year-old male, Movses, Tavush province, Armenia

“There are not enough jobs in the village. It’s dying, people are leaving. We were suffocated by taxes, and then the former Prime Minister visited our village and promised to abolish them. He kept his promise and now it’s a little bit easier. A person living here [in the border region] should be the centre of [the government’s] attention. They must appreciate that we stay here. There are no factories anymore. In Soviet times there were 36 factories in the region.”

Source: Mikayelian, H. (2017) *Societal Perceptions of the Conflict in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh*, Caucasus Institute: Yerevan, p.6.

Source B

What did the counting show?

“As of 1 January 1993, in comparison with the same period in 1992, the number of cattle decreased by 3,300. It is not a secret that such a sharp decline in the number of livestock is a direct result of the imperfect mechanism of privatisation, because of which a mass slaughter of the number of livestock has happened and is still going on not only in the region but also in the republic in general.”

Source: Dokholyan, A. (1993) ‘The Border: A Fighter Does Not Get Weak’, *Aygabat* Newspaper, N4, <https://tert.nla.am/archive/NLA%20TERT/Aygabac/1993/4.pdf>, 12 February, accessed 10 October 2023.

Source C

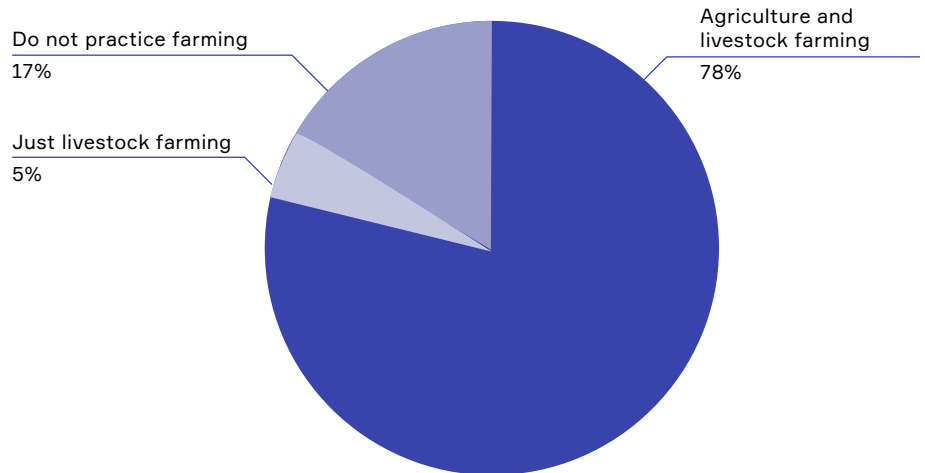
‘The Difficult Present and the Unclear Future of Movses’, 28 October 2008

“There are 540 hectares of arable land in the village. Around 200 hectares are surrounded by mines or located in a dangerous zone between Armenian and Azerbaijani positions. Without irrigation, the peasants do not have the opportunity to sell the meagre crops they have grown with difficulty. Only grapes are delivered to the reception point of the Yerevan Cognac Factory operating in Berd. During the Soviet period, the Aygepar canning factory worked in three shifts, and even accepted mulberries from the peasants. A significant part of the youth of Movses has emigrated, and the number of livestock farmers has also decreased. There used to be 1,000 cattle in Movses, now there are 300. The peasants do not want to engage in livestock farming because it is not profitable.”

Source: Sargsyan, V. (2008) ‘The Difficult Present and the Unclear Future of Movses’, *Hetq News Agency*, 28 October, <https://hetq.am/hy/article/52512>, accessed 10 October 2023.

Source D

Percentage of surveyed households engaged in farming in Movses



Source: MPG (Gallup International Association) (2014) 'Analysis and Assessment of Risks Related to Climate Change', p.102.

Source E

'Textile Production in Movses', 15 August 2017

"The Movses Textile Factory operated in the village from 1988 to 1992. The building was located 500 metres from the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, in the former hospital building (the hospital was closed in 1976), and as a result, it was damaged in the war. The factory produced children's clothes which were exported throughout the USSR. In 1992, the factory was badly damaged and closed down. Most of the villagers worked in the Movses Factory; even former residents of Movses moved back to the village from Yerevan to work there."

Source: Lurer News Agency (2017) 'Textile Production in Movses', 15 August, <http://tinyurl.com/y5w65sdt>, accessed 10 October 2023.

YOUR TASK

Analyse the given sources and make a poster answering the following questions.

- 1 What branches did the economy of Movses consist of before and after the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict erupted?
- 2 How did the conflict affect the development of Movses' economy?
- 3 What age group (children, youth, adults, older people) do you think was most impacted by economic changes in Movses in the period 1988 to 2017 and why?

Group 3 Education

Source A

‘Let the desired peace arrive’, 1 July 1994

“The performance “Farewell to the Kindergarten” by children leaving the Movses kindergarten took place a few days ago. The kindergarten is in a village that for a long time was the target of shelling, and even now the danger of an enemy attack hangs in the air. That is why the event of that day was important: not only because the children were saying goodbye to their early childhood and becoming schoolchildren, but also because in those alarming days, they gained the knowledge with which to enter the new world under the thunder of guns.”

Source: Badalyan, A. (1994) ‘Let the Desired Peace Arrive’, *Aygabatz Newspaper*, <https://tert.nla.am/archive/NLA%20TERT/Aygabac/1994/23.pdf>, 1 July, accessed 10 October 2023.

Source B

‘Children are being transferred from schools in border villages’, 2 September 2014

“In the last five years, the number of school-aged children in the village has been decreasing. Currently, the number of students in the school is 132. According to the director of the school, the emigration of the ‘90s had a great impact on their number; there are almost no young people left in the village. The families did not leave Armenia, but moved from Movses to other areas of the republic.”

Source: Medialab Newsroom-Laboratory (2014) ‘Children Are Being transferred from Schools in Border Villages’, 2 September, https://medialab.am/11880/?fbclid=IwAR0q4sYXTEG-nUwatoxUSIUJw9Z7za6s-94d3T_07xiSxZysm-0Lyp_17XFUf4, accessed 10 October 2023.

Source C

‘Students of the border village of Movses will practise robotics’, 19 December 2018

“With the support of the Stepan Gishyan charity foundation, students of the border village of Movses of Tavush region will be able to make robots and implement three-dimensional modelling. In the ‘Armat’ laboratory, which was established two years ago in Movses, secondary school students learned programming, but they did not succeed in making robots, because they did not have the appropriate devices. Now they will use the knowledge and skills acquired in the laboratory to manage robots.”

Source: Armbanks News Agency (2018) ‘Students of the Border Village of Movses will Practise Robotics’, 19 December, <http://www.armbanks.am/hy/2018/12/19/117927/>, accessed 10 October 2023.

Source D

‘A child living in the border area must receive a good education’, 29 November 2017

“There is no performance hall in the school of Movses village. The school’s former furnace room has recently been renovated with funding from the International Committee of the Red Cross and turned into a safe room, which is of great importance for the school in the border village. The shelter, with an area of 60 square metres, is

Source: Muradyan, L. (2017) ‘A Child Living in the Border Area Must Receive a Good Education’, *Armenian Public Radio*, 29 November, accessed 10 October 2023.

designed to accommodate 139 people. The area is small, but the plan is, temporarily, to organise school events in the shelter. In the school of Movses village, the first skill children are taught is shooting. Last year, the children of the village took 3rd place in the national shooting competitions, and this year they came 4th.”

Source E

A 40-Year-Old Woman from Movses, Tavush region, Armenia

Source: H. Mikayelyan (2017) *Societal Perceptions of the Conflict in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh*, Caucasus Institute: Yerevan, p.6.

“It is not true that our children are nervous because of shelling. The kindergarten has been renovated, and now no shots can be heard from inside it. If the children are outside and hear shots, they go inside. An additional wall is being built in front of the kindergarten to protect it from bullets. Our children are fine, happy, and well fed. The Armenian Foundation provides the kindergarten with food, furniture, and everything we need.”

Source F

A wall has been erected in place of the windows of the school in Movses to protect it from shooting and shelling.



Photo: Javahir Badalyan, a school student from Movses, August 2023.

YOUR TASK

Analyse the given sources and make a poster answering the following questions.

- 1 In what circumstances do the children of Movses village receive education in kindergarten and school?
- 2 What effect did the war have on the educational environment of the children in the village? How have priorities changed?
- 3 What educational prospects do the children of Movses village have?

Group 4 Lifestyle

Source A

‘The Border: A Fighter Does Not Get Weak’,
12 February 1993

Source: Dokholyan, A. (1993) ‘The Border: A Fighter Does Not Get Weak’, *Aygabat* Newspaper, <https://tert.nla.am/archive/NLA%20TERT/Aygabac/1993/4.pdf>, 12 February, accessed 10 October 2023.

“The feeling of war was apparent right at the Yerevan bus station. There was no transport going to Tavush. A number of people had gathered in the small room of the bus station. They had come by bus from Movses and were waiting for it to arrive and take them back. ‘Eh, who needs us? Our children are here, our husbands are at the border, and we are like homeless people on the roads,’ a young woman said, waving her hand. The bus arrived. We made our way to Ijevan, from where a new road had been opened through the mountains to Tavush. The road was so narrow that two cars could barely pass each other in the 50km-long forested mountain pass. A truck approached from the other direction, groaning under its load. This road is the only one connecting Tavush to the republic.”

Source B

‘All will be well’, Head of Movses, 2020

Source: Poghosyan, G. (2020) ‘All Will Be Well’, *Hayzinvor*, <http://www.hayzinvor.am/78401.html>, accessed 10 October 2023.

“It goes without saying that we will not be able to live side by side with an open border. There should be either a third party, like Russia in Soviet times, to exert pressure on both parties, or military forces guarding the border. We will not be able to trust each other again. It’s true that before the war we had Azerbaijani friends. We called them ‘dost’. Armenians and Azerbaijanis used to visit each other’s homes. In our village shop, Azerbaijani women from the neighbouring village were served first because they’d had to walk a long way. After what they did and what we went through, we cannot be friends again.”

Source C

‘All will be well’, Head of Movses, 2020

Source: Poghosyan, G. (2020) ‘All Will Be Well’, *Hayzinvor*, <http://www.hayzinvor.am/78401.html>, accessed 10 October 2023.

“20 percent of the houses in Movses village are already empty. No one lives there. Most of the young people have moved away from the village; after six o’clock you will see five or six people on the streets. Some of the wives in Movses are also ready to leave the country to find work, if Russia grants them citizenship easily enough. I want to go too. Why should I stay? I can’t live under the threat of a bullet. Even schoolchildren, if you ask them, will say: ‘When I finish school, I’ll go to Russia.’ If my son gets citizenship, I’ll go and join him as soon as I can.”

“In 2013, by the decision of the Movses Village Council, the second Saturday of August was designated ‘Village Day’. The Vice-governor of Tavush Region highlighted the importance of holding the event in the border village where, despite the proximity of enemies, the heroic people of Tavush live and work. Celebrating Village Day, the people of Movses emphasise their attachment to their native land. Not only have they not left their homeland, but they also direct efforts made by former villagers, now living abroad, to solve the problems of the village.”



Source: Mtad.am (2017) 'Movses Celebrated Village Day', 14 August, <http://tavush.mtad.am/news/item/2017/08/14/movses/>, accessed 10 October 2023.

Source: Badalyan, A. (2011) 'Locked Doors and Bullet Tracks Are Everywhere Here', *Arevik*, 26 June, <http://tinyurl.com/dfaksyfw>, accessed 10 October 2023.

"The Cultural Centre of the village, built in the 1950s, is a unique architectural structure. During the war and in the following years, a military unit was stationed in the Cultural Centre. Just a few years ago, the military unit moved to the neighbouring village, and the residents started thinking about renovating the Cultural Centre. They applied to the relevant bodies; 100 million drams were allocated (around €236,000). The Palace of Culture was thoroughly renovated. 'We are preparing to organise concerts here. Finally, young people will have a place to gather,' says the village head."

YOUR TASK

Analyse the given sources and make a poster answering the following questions.

- 1 How has life in Movses adapted to war conditions?
- 2 What changes did ideas about a peaceful way of life undergo before and after the war (i.e. the First Nagorno-Karabakh War)?
- 3 In what ways did the war affect the employment and lifestyle of the village youth?

Peer assessment criteria

Criterion	Questions to consider	Points and comments
Content Relevance 1-5	<p>→ Is the content of the poster relevant to the topic or subject matter?</p> <p>→ Does the poster effectively convey key messages or information?</p>	
Clarity of Message 1-5	<p>→ Is the main message or purpose of the poster easy to understand?</p> <p>→ Are visuals and text used to enhance the clarity of the message?</p> <p>→ Is the language clear?</p>	
Organisation and Structure 1-5	<p>→ Is the poster well-organised with a logical flow?</p> <p>→ Are there clear transitions between sections?</p>	
Creativity 1-5	<p>→ Does the poster demonstrate creative thinking?</p> <p>→ Are there unique elements or ideas that make the poster stand out?</p>	
Adherence to Guidelines 1-5	<p>→ Does the poster follow the specific guidelines and requirements provided by the assignment?</p>	