

DIDACTIC UNIT 1

# Gezi Park

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## The Story of a Resistance

Metod Koleji, Ankara, Turkey

2014-2017

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## **Title**

Gezi Park: the Story of a Resistance.

## **Grades addressed**

Students from 13 to 18 years.

## **Duration**

5 Sessions (40 minutes for each).

## **Sources**

- Video “Turkey’s Civil Revolt-Istanbul Rising”.
- Video “Tornistan”.

## **Aims**

1. To develop empathy and social sensitivity.
2. To increase students’ knowledge and understanding of human rights.
3. To change their attitude and start taking action.
4. To raise awareness and foster students’ critical thinking regarding the consequences of -gross- violations of human rights.
5. To foster a critical analysis of the governance.
6. To make students get an idea of the rights of individuals.
7. To make students take the responsibility of others as well as themselves.

### **Other aspects**

- Classroom arrangements: Students will be sitting in pairs and small groups.
- Groups: Students will work individually and in groups.
- Equipment: Papers, Scissors, Crayons and Sticks are needed to make banners for Activity 1.  
A computer, speakers and a projector and internet connection are needed for the activities.

## 2. BIOGRAPHY RATIONALE

Throughout much of history, people acquired rights and responsibilities through their membership in a group – a family, indigenous nation, religion, class, community, or state. Most societies have had traditions similar to the "golden rule" of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The Hindu Vedas, the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, the Bible, the Quran (Koran), and the Analects of Confucius are five of the oldest written sources which address questions of people's duties, rights, and responsibilities. In addition, the Inca and Aztec codes of conduct and justice and an Iroquois Constitution were Native American sources that existed well before the 18th century. In fact, all societies, whether in oral or written tradition, have had systems of propriety and justice as well as ways of tending to the health and welfare of their members.

Its roots, however, lie in earlier tradition and documents of many cultures; it took the catalyst of World War II to propel human rights onto the global stage and into the global conscience. The UDHR was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, partly in response to the atrocities of WWII.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) urges member nations to promote a number of human, civil, economic and social rights, asserting these rights as part of the "foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." The declaration was the first international legal effort to limit the behavior of states and press upon them duties to their citizens. Although the first sentence of the Preamble to the Declaration of Human Rights says that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" it is not the case in reality.

To violate the most basic human rights is to deny individuals their fundamental moral entitlements. It is, in a sense, to treat them if they are less than a human and undeserving of respect and dignity. One well known example based on prejudice involves the Jews who have endured mistreatment and persecution for thousands of years. The largest scale attempt to destroy this group of people occurred during WWII when millions of Jews were exterminated in German concentration camps in the name of Nazi ideals of "racial purity".

In this plan, we have issued the effects of violation of human rights under some circumstances. In this respect, students will be aware of having responsibility not just for themselves but also for

others who suffer from this violation through learning striking examples from history and their negative results on humanity. They will also be able to internalize not to ignore the humiliation of others and co-operate with murderers.

Political and social unrest caused by implementations of these inhumanitarian and undemocratic regimes, stimulate some conscient portion of the civil population to resist the totalitarian domination, a particular power, force, policy or regime. Gezi Park protests in Turkey in 2013 is an opposition to urban development plans and also to government encroachment on freedom of expression and on Turkey's secularist traditions. The students will aim to demonstrate a desire to resist and start taking action when necessary.

### 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

#### 3.1. THE RESISTANCE

The stories of «resistance» are either individual or social. The individualistic is personal, like; resistance against smoking, alcohol, drugs or some disease. On the other hand, social resistance is always against something and consequently everybody will be informed of this in the global world as it is a resistance against the powerful one.

In May and June 2013, Turkey was the scene of a massive protest against the decision of government to rebuild the old barracks buildings to the Gezi Park in Taksim. When the events first appeared, the national media ignored, while the Western media was showing great interest. The protest actions that spread rapidly through social media on the internet were not limited with Istanbul Taksim. It has turned into anti-government and rights-defending protests throughout the country, especially in big cities.



Gezi Park

Participants in the protest were extremely important in this regard. There had not been such a mass action in Turkey before. At the same time, this action was very different from what was seen up to now. There was a different resistance against the policy of suppressing and mobilizing the voices frequently in the country. Unlike the usual marginalized activists, a revolt in which the

majority of the resisters were young people from different parts of the society was staged. Many of the recent decisions the government has taken and the discomfort and irritability that the policies followed are turning into a reflection of society.

The Gezi Resistance initiated a series of debates about the history of the city - and therefore of the park. The attempt of the government to take back the time and rebuild the Artillery Barracks- an attempt to destroy the symbols of the Kemalist progeny was in fact the source of these historical discussions. The shopping mall and the historical barracks, which were tried to be built with the excuse of cutting trees, were the last drop of glass.

Unfortunately, in Turkey, people has not been educated as a high degree of individual confidence, personality and social responsibility for many years.

It can be associated with both the public institutions and the influential social sectors.

All these sections paid attention to people who were connected to it, did not make a disturbing noise and were adaptable. But it was impossible to control all the young people who were growing up. This youth influenced by the social environment on contrary to their parents, teachers, or elders. They lived their freedom in a world, far away from the repressed attitudes of the elders. The virtual world created by the technological revolution pulled this youth in and took them out of the learned desperation of the society in a sense. Its positive or negative consequences will be seen in the future, but the fact is that this youth who was born in the 1990s has created a new social dynamic.

Rapid technological developments in the world in recent years have been regarded as the beginning of a new era. In short, this new technology, called the "information revolution", has begun to directly affect our social lives. The most popular and influential part of this technology is undoubtedly the internet. Social network and communication applications developed on the Internet have increased this attractiveness. It was seen that even the unexpected community members used these social networks very effectively. The people who took to the streets through social media in the protests of the Taksim Gezi Park exposed a reality. Even if you try to hide or ignore an event that is happening in the country, a well used virtual environment is able to achieve even more.



The social environment in which young people of the information age actively take part in the Gezi Park Protests is very important. They socialized in a virtual way on the internet. Another characteristic of this youth, who is the driving force of action, is that some of its sensitivities are still developing and not suppressed. The danger that the elders learn is not valid for them. They are very benefited from the freedom of the new age and urbanism. Therefore, the new generation of young people have started to grow in a very attentive and free environment. Anyone, including parents, will be reacted if they intervene or even attempt to intervene to their lives. The decisions taken by the government in recent years without taking into consideration the public in every area and creating an uneasiness have attracted reaction of this youth. This reaction is not a political party proposition, but an extremely independent and irresponsible reaction. Both the CHP and the AKP did not understand this correctly. The preferences of these young people will be determined by the free choice method, not by the blind adherence logic.

### 3.2. GEZI LITERATURE



“The Story” was one of the words, which was used frequently during the Gezi Resistance. Suddenly, the generation, which had not had large, collective stories, but was stuck in an atomic, cynical existence became a part of the “big story” with Gezi Resistance. Actually, the concept turned into “The happening story is yours.” from “The narrated story is yours”. Literature was on the street, slogans like “Book off, poetry on the street” were on the walls; the artists were pointing the street, Taksim Square, barricades as the biggest possible installation art example and they were indicating the “street” as the real place of art. So did the filmmakers...

The theater was also being acted on the street; street performances, based on mutual interaction, took place of theater programs. The canceled concerts and festivals signaled that the main place of the music, stuck in the sheltered artificial stages of the "culture industry" was the street. The buzz and the noise of the street, the instruments added to the slogans were part of a great song.

The slogans which were limited to "vive la.." or "damned.." of old political language turned into a mocking and multi-layered language which could jest with government and even with itself and engorge itself with literature and philosophy. This language, which can take a punch at its own suffering and the government, has become the subject of many writings such as "humor and resistance" as a form of resistance. Despite a terrible police strike from the first days of the resistance, the resisters did not give up teasing and creativity. "Bro, you are filling my eyes with tears with your gas bomb." and "Wow this is the revolution." which were two of many graffiti have created a political language that covers many different sensibilities and perspectives in everyday life.



The first notable publication on behalf of Gezi literature was the compilation of a story called Kahrolsun Bağzı Şeyler. In this review, twenty-eight authors addressed the subject in different directions and applied to various literary devices. A similar compilation was published in the editorial of Nalan Barbarosoğlu with "Biber Gazi Öyküleri". This story follows a few basic thematic and literary gemstones and gives the first signs in a sense for the literature to be formed later on.

Biber Gazi Öyküleri by Nalan Barbarasoglu

## 4. BIOGRAPHY

### Who Were the Resisters?

The early days of the protest were decisive in creating solidarity among groups who have been upholding rival ideologies and worldviews. Gezi Park has become a niche of political socialization, active engagement and self-restraint. Probably a couple of examples can help to illustrate the situation. One remarkable dynamic in the Park is taking place between the Kurdish people who have been struggling against police brutality for decades and the Turkish ‘nationalists’ as a bit stretched-out concept encompassing the left-wing nationalism, right-wing nationalism, and ‘Kemalists’. Among the latter group are individuals, including high school kids, housewives, and white-collar middle-class individuals, who are taking part in a protest for the first time in their lives and whose only means of political expression lies in the Turkish flag and the principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Thousands of people — anarchists, socialists, communists, trade unionists, feminists, LGBT community, “anti-capitalist Muslims,” Kurdish movement representatives, soccer fans and nationalist-secularists — stood up together almost miraculously against the increasingly authoritarian, populist, conservative neoliberalism represented by the AKP. These traditionally adversary groups have shown an incredible display of self-restraint in the recent events, as they have resisted against the violent police attacks side by side. This is not to say that they have come to recognize each other’s claims for this is very difficult to achieve in the short-run, but the mere fact that they have put aside their conflictual stances for a ‘greater’ cause is definitely a novelty in Turkish politics. The picture below that was taken during the police intervention in Gezi lucidly illustrates this point, as the girl to the left is carrying a Turkish flag with the picture of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the boy on the right is holding the flag of the Kurdish party BDP trying to run away from the police attack hand in hand.



“A photo of resisters who support different ideas run away from the police attack.”

One of the most proactive involvements during the protests came from the fan groups of the three prominent football teams in Turkey, Fenerbahçe, Galatasaray, and particularly the Beşiktaş fan group Çarşı. Çarşı has been the most vibrant fan group in political events, showing up continuously in 1st of May demonstrations. Since the onset of the Gezi protests, the group has been in the frontlines forming barricades against police attacks and protecting the ‘inexperienced’ and ‘unarmed’ protestors. Yet, the culture of football in Turkey is generally imbued in a heavy patriarchal mentality, whereby many slogans carry sexist or homophobic undertones. The Gezi resistance has given way to a process of learning and understanding between the Çarşı football fans on the one hand and the LGBTT and women’s rights organizations on the other. The latter has been endeavoring to cleanse the language of protest from sexist and homophobic expressions, and the former has been quite attentive to such warning.

Currently, there is no major political party that corresponds to the eruption caused by the uprising. Almost all political parties deeply absorbed by the rules of parliamentary democracy have lagged behind the courage and creativity of the popular protests, in which millions took the streets.



“We are not resisting under a certain policy. We are the public.”

### The Attitude of Government

Against this backdrop, the government has been blatantly using disproportionate police force towards peaceful protesters, deeming them vandals and good-for-nothing alcoholics that lack any legitimacy. The successive declarations made by the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan have infuriated the protesters and their supporters as he threatened to ‘unleash’ the 50 % of the society who voted for the Justice and Development Party, implying a civil war.

Since the beginnings of the protests, not only has the Prime Minister undermined the demands of protesters, he has also openly targeted certain segments of the society. And for a moment the divisions and conflicts seemed to be transcended in Gezi park against the common enemy. However, this does not mean that they had been erased or condoned peacefully. Indeed, the government has been doing its best to exploit the divisions along the familiar line of “Turkish vs. Kurdish” and “Muslim vs. secular.” In order to isolate the protesters, the government called them “vandals” (çapulcu), “marginals,” or agents of an international conspiracy. (such as the CEO of a prominent bank due to his support for the Gezi resistance), and triggered hatred and hostility with his comments. An imam who opened the doors of a mosque for the wounded during the clash to have medical treatment has been suspended from his job post because he refuted the

claim made by Erdoğan that the protestors were ‘partying’ in this particular mosque. Today, one of the biggest Justice Halls in Istanbul, Çağlayan Adliyesi has been raided by the police, resulting in 73 arrests of lawyers that have been defending the protestors under custody.

However, the questions that often confront uprisings of such massive scale — where millions have taken to the streets for systemic changes, not for a cosmetic makeover — remain to be engaged. The aim is more than “winning an election” in the next two years under the sign of one existing party or another. And it is no less than planting the seeds of a future “people’s democracy,” which will require a thorough transformation of the existing class relations and hierarchies constituted by a patriarchal homophobic neoliberal capitalism. “This is just a beginning, we keep struggling,” as the powerful slogan of Gezi Resistance says.

### The Symbols of Gezi Park Protests



The woman in red

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Standing man shows his respect to Ataturk –a passive resistance-



Shoes of the ones who lost their lives are standing in Taksim square symbolically.

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A passive resistance –the man is reading book against the police barricade-



## **5. ACTIVITIES**

### **5.1. ACTIVITY 1: Starting the lesson**

Teacher starts the lesson by clicking the video below to make students understand what they are going to learn.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0Uwh971f6w>

## 5.2. ACTIVITY 2: Creative action of irony

Civil resistance is a powerful way for people to fight for their rights, freedom, justice, and self-determination without the use of violence. Forms of action may include demonstrations, vigils, and petitions; strikes, go-slows, mass protests, boycotts and emigration movements; and sit-ins, occupations, and the creation of parallel institutions of government.

The non-violent civil resistant movement initiated by many diverse groups of people used satire and other unconventional ways of successfully spreading its message of resistance against the undemocratic regime of government.

Humor is the first step to break taboos and fears. Making people laugh about dangerous situations like dictatorship, repression, censorship is a first weapon against those fears. Without beating fear, you cannot make any change. Humor in a situation of deadly seriousness can also be really funny way to resist. These actions don't change the world, but they do indeed change the situation and the communication.

**Students design creative and humorous banners after reading the text above and examining the samples below from Gezi Protests.**



## Gezi Park

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Metod Koleji, Ankara, Turkey



If there is no park, I will poo in malls!

### **5.3. ACTIVITY 3: Everything is OK!**

After the Gezi Protests, many supporters of the resistance gave impressive works of art summarizing and defining the main aspects which lead people to think again about the status quo. An award winning animated short film “Tornistan” created by Ayce Kartal is a striking example of the clash between two points of view on subject.

1. Students watch the video “Tornistan”, which puts emphasis on media, which leads people to be unaware of the conditions they live in.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DSf01ARngk>

2. Teacher leads them for brainstorming about the impact of partisan press upon people’s reaction.

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