

*“As wrenching as it is evocative and hopeful.”*

—RITA WILLIAMS-GARCIA,  
Newbery Honor-winning author of *One Crazy Summer*

# Like Water on Stone



DANA WALRATH

**EDUCATORS' GUIDE**

INCLUDES COMMON CORE STANDARDS CORRELATIONS



## ABOUT THE BOOK

The word “genocide” was coined by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish lawyer of Jewish descent who began studying ethnic cleansing upon learning of the World War I-era slaughter of Armenian Christians under Turkish Ottoman rule. While this genocide is well documented, Turkey has yet to formally acknowledge its role in the killings.

*Like Water on Stone* by Dana Walrath is a fictional account of the Armenian genocide. This novel in verse recounts the flight to America of three Armenian children after the Ottoman Turks confiscate their family’s flour mill and murder their parents. For sixty-three days the children travel on foot, above the tree line of the Caucasus Mountains and through the Syrian Desert, to reach refuge in Aleppo, Syria. Taken in by a sympathetic Arab shopkeeper, the children disguise themselves as Arabs to avoid being forcibly relocated to the Deir el-Zor concentration camp, where starvation and barbarity led to certain death. After three years in hiding, the children finally receive a letter and boat tickets to America from their *keri* (maternal uncle).

For information about the Armenian genocide, see the following websites:

- [history.com/topics/armenian-genocide](http://history.com/topics/armenian-genocide) (the History Channel, “Armenian Genocide”)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=Djhch-lWnpc](http://youtube.com/watch?v=Djhch-lWnpc) (*The Hidden Holocaust* documentary)
- [armenian-genocide.org/young-turks.html](http://armenian-genocide.org/young-turks.html) (Armenian National Institute, “Young Turks and the Armenian Genocide”)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dana Walrath, writer, poet, artist, Fulbright Scholar, and second-generation Armenian, is committed to the movement for reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia. She believes an honest reckoning of history, apology, and forgiveness are essential and will help to bring about peace. She lives in Vermont.



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ADRINEH GREGORIAN



## PREREADING ACTIVITIES

Before beginning *Like Water on Stone*, conduct a mini-lesson on nationalism and colonialism as it affected the rising tensions in Europe and the Middle East at the turn of the twentieth century.

—Display a map of Turkey and note the areas of twentieth-century Armenian settlement; see [historyplace.com/worldhistory/genocide/armenians.htm](http://historyplace.com/worldhistory/genocide/armenians.htm).

—Conduct a debate on nationalism as an ideology. This website will help you set the parameters for the debate: [debate.org/opinions/can-nationalism-be-a-force-for-good](http://debate.org/opinions/can-nationalism-be-a-force-for-good).

—For video clips on the causes of World War I, see [history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history/videos/causes-of-world-war-i](http://history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history/videos/causes-of-world-war-i).

—To consider the consequences of alliances in Europe at the turn of the twentieth century, see [bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/middleeast01.shtml](http://bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/middleeast01.shtml).

—Music and dance play an integral role in *Like Water on Stone*. The following videos will introduce you to specific Armenian dances and instruments.

- [youtube.com/watch?v=wRqstpVghMM](http://youtube.com/watch?v=wRqstpVghMM) (Tamzara dance)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=6GiU3e5zJS8](http://youtube.com/watch?v=6GiU3e5zJS8) (the sound of the *zurna*)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=BPINzHA6ttl](http://youtube.com/watch?v=BPINzHA6ttl) (the sound of the *dumbek*)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=8viQSBpOjqM](http://youtube.com/watch?v=8viQSBpOjqM) (the sound of the *duduk*)

## DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITY PROMPTS

### PART I: PALU, 1914

In this section, the author juxtaposes colliding cultures and ideologies, and old- and new-world views.

Twelve-year-old Shahen, an Armenian Christian, hopes to break free from his predictable life as flour mill proprietor's son. In 1914, being Armenian means being oppressed by Turkish Ottoman rule. Shahen wants to move to America, like his maternal uncle did before him. Five-year-old Mariam adores her brother Shahen and loves playing their special bird game. Sister Sosi, twin to Shahen, is being tutored in Armenian Christian womanhood under the loving guidance of her mother. Anahid, the oldest sister, is married to a Kurdish Muslim and is

pregnant with her first child. Papa works the land of his ancestors, finding joy in playing traditional music on his *oud* with his Kurd and Turkish Muslim friends.

Ardziv the eagle becomes attached to this family when Sosi finds one of his feathers while collecting beetles to make dye for carpets.



## DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITY PROMPTS *(continued)*

While reading Part I, consider the following:

1. How important are family bonds to a family facing imminent destruction? Explain.
2. *Like Water on Stone* is written poetically, in a stream-of-consciousness style. As you read, evaluate the author's purpose for writing the story this way.
3. Discuss Walrath's use of figurative language [e.g., "I am his little dove" (p. 13); "His soaring sound pulled me from the sky, like gravity must for those who can't fly" (p. 16); "Water and wheel glistened like gems. The mill sang its own song" (p. 45)].
4. The color red is used figuratively throughout *Like Water on Stone*. Find some examples in the text. What is the author's purpose for this?
5. Ardziv sees Kurds weaving a rug with an interlocking diamond pattern. Inside each diamond is a cross. On every third and fourth page of this book, there is a diamond/cross border illustration. What does this design symbolize?
6. Compare Papa's relationship with Shahen and Papa's relationship with Shahen's older brothers, Misak and Kevorg. How are the relationships different?
7. Explore the relationship between Sosi and Mama both in this section and in Part II, "Massacre, 1915." How are maternal instinct, coming of age, and love manifested?
8. What role is Ardziv beginning to play in Shahen's, Sosi's, and Mariam's lives?

9. The ability and the desire to fly play an important role in the book. Analyze Ardziv's flight, Mariam's flying game, and Shahen's desire to flee to America.

### Curriculum Connection

In Part I, Dana Walrath references daily routines—making rugs, gathering and pitting apricots—and world events—the Hamidian massacres, prejudicial treatment of Armenian Christians by the Muslim Turks, and Turkey fighting alongside Germany against Russia, France, and England in World War I—as she describes Shahen's and Sosi's coming of age. Have students, in groups or individually, research topics and present their findings using electronic media.

### Part II: Massacre, 1915

This section begins with Sosi at the loom, weaving a wool rug. Against her mother's orders, she weaves a blood red-breasted bird that looks "more dead than dreaming" (p. 102), then changes her mind, cuts the design out of the rug, and stuffs a tuft of the wool into her dress pocket. Mass exodus from Palu, Armenia, begins. Vahan—Sosi's love interest—and his family leave Palu. Stubborn Papa cleaves to his ancestral lands, claiming that his Muslim musician friends will help protect his family. Shahen, Sosi, and Miriam's older brothers are wrenched from the mill by Ottoman soldiers. The twins and young Mariam flee to the mountains as Mama and Papa are brutally murdered. Before the



children's flight, Papa tells Shahen to find the Church of the Holy Martyrs in Aleppo, Syria.

- Read about the 2014 destruction of the Armenian Holy Martyrs Church, erected as a memorial to the Armenian genocide, at [cnsnews.com/news/article/lauretta-brown/isis-dynamites-church-memorializing-victims-armenian-genocide](http://cnsnews.com/news/article/lauretta-brown/isis-dynamites-church-memorializing-victims-armenian-genocide).
- For images of the destruction, see [agbu.org/news-itm/agbu-strongly-condemns-isis-attack-on-the-sacred-holy-martyrs-church-and-armenian-genocide-memorial-in-deir-ez-zor/](http://agbu.org/news-itm/agbu-strongly-condemns-isis-attack-on-the-sacred-holy-martyrs-church-and-armenian-genocide-memorial-in-deir-ez-zor/).
- For a poignant documentary about victims of the Armenian genocide, watch *Grandma's Tattoos* at [youtube.com/watch?v=bwj4ef1Dl](http://youtube.com/watch?v=bwj4ef1Dl).

While reading Part II, consider the following:

1. This section opens with Sosi weaving her dowry rug at the loom, hearing a song by Armenian troubador Sayat Nova in her head. Read the lyrics to the song, "I Beheld My Love this Morning," at [allpoetry.com/I-beheld-my-love-this-morning](http://allpoetry.com/I-beheld-my-love-this-morning) and compare the poem's theme with the events in *Like Water on Stone*.
2. Discuss the signs of imminent danger to the family. Why does Papa refuse to leave the land of his ancestors?
3. The color red is still powerfully present in Part II: the dreaming bird that Sosi knots into (and cuts out of) her dowry rug has a red breast; the family's grapevines are laden with red buds. Is the color red in *Like Water on Stone* a

symbol of life or a symbol of death? Explain.

4. Discuss how Mama and Papa save Shahen, Sosi, and Mariam from certain death at the hands of the Ottoman Turks. What does this feat reveal about both Mama and Papa?
5. Why does Mama make Sosi take the cooking pot for the children's journey?
6. Compare Ardziv's loss of his eagle mate with the Donabedian family's loss.

### Curriculum Connection

After reading about the plight of each Donabedian family member (including Misak, Kevorg, and Analid and her husband and in-laws) and the plight of Papa's friend Mustafa and his wife, Fatima, assign each student a member of this Turkish/Kurd/Armenian genocide through the eyes of their given character; have them write stream-of-consciousness poems describing their character's feelings and actions. What impromptu measures would they take to stay alive or to prepare for death?





## DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITY PROMPTS (continued)

### PART III: JOURNEY, SUMMER 1915

Now begins the children's sixty-three-night flight south through the mountains and the Syrian Desert, to the city of Aleppo in modern-day Syria. Ardziv the eagle soars above them each night.

He protects them in several instances: he lures Ottoman Turk shepherds off their trail, and he lures a bear away from their hideout when the blood scent left by game he drops for them to eat attracts her to their hideout.

Sosi sees Mama's black pot and Ardziv's eagle feather, which Mama sewed into the hem of Shahen's skirt, as gifts that provide her with strength. Shahen views them as worthless and would rather be rid of them. He continually blames his father for the family's plight. When Shahen leaves the hideout to enter a village on a quest for food and doesn't return as quickly as he promised, Sosi and Mariam retreat toward home.

Returning with food, Shahen finds two sticks on the ground, tied together by a red thread, forming a cross pointing north. Frantic with fear for his sister's lives, he races after them.

Reunited, the children begin their journey again, descending southward toward Aleppo. Because of Mama's black pot, the children are saved from certain death at the hands of a Turk who discovers them: Shahen brings the metal pot down hard on the Turk's head. Shahen finally recognizes Mama's gift, and it gives him strength. The children make their final descent from the mountains into the Syrian Desert, lugging Mama's pot filled with mountain water. Just before Mama and Papa made

the children flee their home in Palu, Papa told Shahen to "follow the water" (p. 316). While walking along a dry riverbed in the Syrian Desert, the children meet a merciful bedouin who has deep, dark eyes just like Papa's.

After reading Part III, consider the following:

1. In this section, Sosi decides to head back toward home. Why?
2. Describe the qualities of a good leader. How does Shahen demonstrate those qualities?
3. Why do you think Mariam kisses the eagle?
4. The children find refuge in the Syrian Desert. How did the black pot help?
5. Analyze all the water-on-stone metaphors up to this point as they relate to Shahen.

### Curriculum Connection

Some say survival is 80 percent mental (keeping a positive mental attitude), 10 percent skill (knowledge), and 10 percent equipment (specialized resources).

On their journey, Shahen thinks the black pot is a huge liability. The red thread in Sosi's pocket becomes a true comfort for her. Shahen's feather is recovered by Sosi as the music of home courses through Shahen's consciousness. How are these three items vital to the children's survival? Conduct a problem-solving scenario in groups of four or five. Adapt the developmental needs of students engaged in the reading of *Like Water on Stone*.



cosee-central-gom.org/seascholars/lesson\_plans/cruisin/lostatsea\_lesson.html\*

montclair.edu/media/montclairedu/csam/njsoc/sessions/survival.pdf  
eduplace.com/rdg/gen\_act/survival/s\_game.html

wildernesscollege.com/basic-survival-skills.html

\*Note: The COSEE site above provides for a time line for written analysis—a Common Core State Standards requirement.

#### PART IV: 1919

In this section, Shahen, Sosi, and Mariam are living and working in Aleppo with their foster father, an Arab merchant. In his Arab garb, Shahen watches as orphaned Armenians are marched out into the Syrian Desert, forced to go to Deir el-Zor—a concentration camp—to die. Shahen also finds a tea shop in Aleppo where a man plays his *oud*. He watches the man's hands and practices playing such an instrument on a nut shop counter, Ardziv's quill poised in his right hand. Finally, a letter from the children's uncle in America arrives, with plane tickets. The children, thanks to "one black pot, a single quill, and a tuft of red wool" (p. 334)—and thanks to Mama and Papa and Ardziv and a kind bedouin—are on their way to freedom in America. They reach the Statue of Liberty on a page that features the Kurdish diamond-and-cross border.

Ardziv is watching from above.

To read an essay about a mass grave found at Deir el-Zor (Der Zor), see [nytimes.com/2008/12/07/magazine/07lives-t.html?fta=y&\\_r=0](http://nytimes.com/2008/12/07/magazine/07lives-t.html?fta=y&_r=0).

While reading Part III, consider the role of Ardziv in *Like Water on Stone*.

#### Author's Note

In this note, Dana Walrath describes the impetus for writing *Like Water on Stone*. She doesn't know much about her grandmother's flight from her flour-mill home in Palu to America during the Armenian genocide, other than that she traveled by night with her older brother and sister. Walrath visited Palu and had tea on the rooftop of a flour mill with its present owners. She says she created the eagle Ardziv to keep the children—and herself—safe on the flight to freedom.

After reading the Author's Note, consider the following:

1. *Like Water on Stone* is dedicated "to the survivors, to those who fell, and to those who cross divides to prevent genocide." Analyze the meaning of "those who cross divides."
2. *Like Water on Stone* opens with an Armenian proverb: "Where the needle passes, the thread passes also." How does this proverb relate to the book?

#### Curriculum Connection


A proverb is written to advise the reader or shed light on a general truth. Explore proverbs in your own culture and share those that matter to you by committing them to paper using calligraphy. For examples, visit [creativeproverbs.com](http://creativeproverbs.com).


# COMMON CORE CORRELATIONS


For a complete listing of the standards, see [corestandards.org/the-standards](http://corestandards.org/the-standards).


## HISTORY SOCIAL STUDIES, GRADES 9 AND UP

### Key Ideas and Details


 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2:** Determine the central ideas of information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.


 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2:** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.


 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.3:** Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes a law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).


 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3:** Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.


### Craft and Structure

 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.


 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.


 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5:** Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, casually).

 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5:** Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.

 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6:** Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).


### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas


 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7:** Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8:** Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.


## HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES SCIENCE & TECHNICAL SUBJECTS WRITING


### Text Types and Purposes


 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.1** and **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.1:** Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2** and **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.2:** Produce informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.


### Production and Distribution of Writing


 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.4** and **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.4:** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.


 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.6:** Use technology, including the internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas clearly and efficiently.

 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.6:** Use technology, including the internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

### Research to Build and Present Knowledge

 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.7:** Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.7:** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

 **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.9** and **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.9:** Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

This guide was created by Judith Turner, a longtime educator at Terrace Community Middle School in Tampa, Florida. She has a BA in Literature and Language from the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay and an MA in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from the University of South Florida.