A Moment of Silence

At the end of this session, you should be able to understand
- purpose and references of the poem “A Moment of Silence”

Questions about the Poem: “A Moment of Silence”
- What references did you not understand?
- To whom is the author speaking?
- What is the author’s purpose?
- Why is the author asking for many more moments of silence?
- What is the author’s point?
- How is this poem related to globalization?

Student interpretation of “A Moment of Silence”
- What is the author’s point?
  *We should include in silence not only crimes against “us” but also our crimes against “them.” Otherwise we are blind hypocrites.*
- How is this poem related to globalization?
  *Except for 9/11 all other crimes and terror took place outside of U.S. Sadness about lost lives are a global phenomenon. In the big picture 9/11 is only a relatively “small” event. We are not only victims but also perpetrators on a global scale. We are talking about “our” losses but are silent about inflicted on “them” by our government/institutions/personnel. ➔ “Let your silence begin at the beginning of crime”*

Discussion of poem related historical events:

**The Acteal massacre in Mexico (1997)**
- was committed by paramilitary forces of 45 Indian families, mostly women and children, on December 22, 1997, who demanded the right to remain on their native lands and not be expropriated. The survivors of Acteal were forced from their homes and live in squalid conditions with no clean water, medical care, sanitation, employment or decent shelter. The refugees rely on international assistance for their very existence Mexico
  *http://www.rehberg.net/acteal/index.htm*

- On 10 December 1981, in the village of El Mozote in the Department of Morazan, units of the Atlacatl Battalion detained, without resistance, all the men, women and children who were in the place. The following day, 11 December, after having the people locked in their homes during the night, the soldiers separated the men from the women and children and locked everyone up in different groups in the church, the convent and various houses. During the morning, they proceeded to interrogate, torture and execute the men in various locations. Around noon, they began taking the women in groups, separating them from their children
and machine-gunning them. Finally, they killed the children. A group of children who had been locked in the convent were machine-gunned through the windows. After exterminating the entire population, the soldiers set fire to the buildings...... More than 500 identified victims perished at El Mozote and in other villages. Many other victims have not been identified.

- Accounts of these massacres were provided by eyewitnesses. Despite public complaints of a massacre and the ease with which they could have been verified, the Salvadoran authorities did not order an investigation and consistently denied that the massacre had taken place.
- ...The Atlacatl Battalion was a "Rapid Deployment Infantry Battalion" or "BIRI", that is, a unit specially trained for "counter-insurgency" warfare. It was the first unit of its kind in the armed forces and had completed its training under the supervision of United States military advisors, at the beginning of that year, 1981.
- Under the UN sponsored Truth Commission, an Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team found in 1992 a total of 143 skeletons, 131 of which belonged to children under 12. The bullet cartridges showed manufacture in Lake city, Missouri.

El Mozote massacre of nuns in El Salvador in 1980

- San Salvador. On December 2, 1980, three American nuns and a lay worker were abducted, raped and shot in San Salvador. Nuns Dorothy Kazel, Ita Ford, Maura Clark, and lay worker Jean Donovan were raped and shot by guardsmen. The murders occurred as the US began a 10-year $7 billion aid effort to prevent left-wing guerrillas from coming to power.
- Under much international pressure, 5 national guardsmen were 10 years later convicted and sentenced to 30 years in prison. The guardsmen admitted that they were acting on orders from above.
- In 1993 a UN Truth Commission report concluded that Colonel Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, director of the National Guard, his brother Edgardo, and General Jose Guillermo Garcia, the minister of defense, had organized an official cover-up.
- Colonel Casanova and his brother were granted residence in the United States.
- Three of the 5 convicted guardsmen were released in 1998 due to prison overcrowding. In 1999 families of the victims filed suit against Casanova and Garcia who were living in Florida. In 2000 a federal jury in the U.S. cleared the 2 retired generals from any wrongdoing...
- In January 1982 the U.S. began training Salvadoran troops at Fort Bragg and Fort Benning. To keep aid going to El Salvador the Reagan administration had to certify that it was making progress on human rights. This finding was immediately refuted in the press by numerous human rights organizations. The Salvadoran Communal Union (UCS) complained that at least ninety officials of peasant organizations had been killed in 1981. Amnesty International reported human rights violations on a "massive scale." The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and Americas Watch argued there were hundreds of politically motivated murders, torture, and mutilation by paramilitary forces. The Washington Post and the New York Times reported extensively on the El Mozote massacre. Relatives of the four murdered churchwomen complained that the Salvadoran government had covered up the case and had not tried anyone for their murders. Dozens of those in the U.S. Congress were so appalled that they sponsored a resolution to declare the certification null and void. A Newsweek poll found that 89% of those familiar with U.S. policy said that the United States should not send troops to El Salvador.
Movies about Human Rights Violations and the Role of U.S. & Western Powers

- CRY FREEDOM (1987) by Richard Attenborough, Starring: Kevin Kline, Denzel Washington = Gripping movie about the life and murder of Steven Biko in South Africa’s apartheid regime
- SALVADOR (1986) by Oliver Stone = U.S. freelance journalist becomes involved in the brutalities of San Salvador’s civil war in 1980’s
- MISSING (1982) by Costa-Gavras, Starring: Jack Lemmon, Sissy Spacek = Oscar winning movie about an American who “disappears” during a CIA supported military coup in Latin America
- THE OFFICIAL STORY (1985) by Luis Puenzo, Starring: Norma Aleandro = Uncovers secrets about the “dirty” civil war in Argentina in the 1980s
- IT’s RAINING IN SANTIAGO (1975) by Helvio Soto = pseudo-documentary about Pinochet’s military coup in Chile 1973 and brave resistance
- THE PANAMA DECEPTION (1992) by Barbara Trent, Starring: Elizabeth Montgomery = Documentary about how media suppressed the “collateral damage” of the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama. Dick Cheney and Colin Powell are part of the plot!