

Children in War: Israeli and Palestinian Experiences

High School English Unit

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Overview: This lesson has three parts: an historical background (to prepare students to understand the complexity of the conflict); a literary component where students read two short excerpts from memoirs – one by a Palestinian, one by an Israeli – and several poems; and a creative writing component in which students respond to these writings.

Objectives: Students will learn more about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and literary representations of it. Students will be exposed to multiple viewpoints on the same issue and will increase their analytical and writing skills by bringing together these viewpoints.

Standards (based on 10th grade reading and writing standards):

Reading:

Strand 2, Concept 2 – Historical and Cultural Aspects of Literature

PO 1. Describe the historical and cultural aspects found in cross-cultural works of literature.

Strand 3, Concept 1 – Expository Text

PO 2. Distinguish supported inferences from unsupported inferences in expository selections such as editorials, newspaper articles, essays, reviews, and critiques.

PO 8. Support conclusions drawn from ideas and concepts in expository text.

Writing:

Nearly all the strands and concepts of good writing apply.

Connections:

High School Social Studies standards: Strand 2 (World History), Concept 9, P.O. 2 specifically references the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Readings that are used in the lesson:

1. Historical background sections (“Background to the Conflict” and “Conflict and Compromise since 1948”).
2. Excerpt from: Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness: A Memoir*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2003. pp. 352-364.
3. Excerpt from: Ibtisam Barakat, *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. pp. 19-28, 35-43.
- 4: Poetry: Taha Muhammad Ali - “Revenge” and Yehuda Amichai – “Jerusalem” and “Wildpeace.”

Procedures/Directions for implementing the lesson:

1. Ask students what they know about borders and about the issue of two different peoples inhabiting the same or adjoining land. Referencing their experience living in a border land, ask them what Americans and Mexicans have in common? What issues

divide them? What are potential points of conflict? Have there been attempts to resolve these issues that take *both sides'* interests into account? The Palestinian-Israeli conflict also involves two different groups of people living in close proximity to each other and (like the U.S.-Mexican border issue) involves groups with different degrees of power.

2. Have students read the “Background to the Conflict” section (2 pages long). While they read, they should think about what claims each side has to the land and what factors have led to a conflict between them. Discuss the reading together and student responses to the questions that follow. (Make sure that they have some understanding of the different perspectives of Israelis and Palestinians.)

3. Next, have students read the selection from *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, the autobiography of an Israeli man, Amos Oz. (Amos Oz has won many literary awards such as the Israel Prize and the Frankfurt Peace Prize.) Although he was born in Jerusalem in 1939, his parents were recent immigrants from Europe, fleeing the rise of the Nazis to power. He was 9 years old when the state of Israel was created – and war broke out. The selection that students will read tells about Amos’ life in Jerusalem in the years just before the state of Israel was created and what happened in the day and months following the United Nations vote which established the state of Israel. Discuss the reading. (Point out that his parents were relatively new to the area, highly educated in European languages and traditions but less comfortable in Hebrew. Also, notice the effect of the creation of the state of Israel on the Jews of Jerusalem – and their suffering in the war that followed.)

4. Tell them to read the second background section, “Conflict and Compromise since 1948.” Discuss. What might Amos and his family be experiencing in the years following the war of 1948? How might the Palestinians regard the same events in a different light?

5. The next literary selection is from Ibtisam Barakat’s *Tasting the Sky* (a recently published book for which she has already won an award from the Middle East Outreach Council). Ibtisam is a Palestinian, who was born in Ramallah in 1964. The selection tells of some of her experiences as a refugee during the Six Day War when she was 3 years old. (The reading skips one chapter in which her family fought their way on board a truck and crossed into Jordan.) Discuss and compare her experiences with those of Amos Oz in an earlier conflict.

6. Next read the three poems: “Revenge” by Palestinian poet Taha Muhammad Ali - and “Jerusalem” and “Wildpeace” both by Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai. What feelings does each poem express? Do the two poets share a similar view about the conflict or different ones? Do the students agree or disagree with the poems?

7. Creative writing: Working individually or in groups, students should imagine a meeting between the authors of the two memoirs in which Ibtisam and Amos sit down for a cup of tea and share their stories. What difficulties would they have to overcome to get together? (Amos Oz lives in southern Israel; Ibtisam Barakat lives in Missouri.) What

language would they speak? What might they have in common? (Note: Students could look up both authors online to find out more about their work and interests.) In discussing the topic of war between Arabs and Israelis, what might they agree on or disagree on? Would they agree or disagree with the feelings expressed in the three poems the students have read? Students should incorporate description and dialogue in their story. They should also include specific details from the literary selections to support their work.

Extension activities:

1. Read the beginning chapter of Ibtisam Barakat's book when she talks about her teenage years. Analyze what challenges she faces that are common to teenagers everywhere and which ones are specific to her residence in a land occupied by foreign troops. Read more of Amos Oz's book, looking at which aspects of his life are influenced by political instability in his country.
2. Read selections from Deborah Ellis' *Three Wishes: Israeli and Palestinian Children Speak*, a collection of personal accounts by children between the ages of 8 and 18 and/or Mervet Sha'Ban, Galit Fink, and Litsa Boudalika's *If You Could Be My Friend: Letters of Mervet Akram Sha'Ban and Galit Fink*, a book of actual letters exchanged between an Israeli and a Palestinian girl in which they talk about their lives and the conflict that divides their peoples. (You are welcome to use the excerpts from both books found in the High School Social Studies lesson included in this packet.) Have the students make a chart of the major issues that the children raise. (You can find a list included in the teachers' materials in the Social Studies lesson.) Have them list different Israeli views and Palestinian views on each issue. Which issues do Palestinians and Israelis agree/disagree on? Which issues seem to be controversial within the Palestinian or Israeli community? (For example, two of the Israeli children have very different ideas about the issue of Jewish settlements in occupied territories.) Be sure to stress that just as different Americans have different views on politics and society, so too do Palestinians and Israelis have a wide variety of opinions.