

The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict and the Search for Peace

High School Social Studies Unit

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Overview: This lesson will give students a background to the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, allow them to read several short eyewitness accounts by various Palestinian and Israeli children, require them to look up more about one of the issues the children raise, and have them develop proposals to improve relations between Israelis and Palestinians. Approximate time frame: 3-4 50-minute class periods.

Objectives: Students will learn more about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and peace process. Students will explore/analyze multiple perspectives on the same issue and will increase their analytical skills by developing proposals to help alleviate tensions between the two peoples.

Standards:

Strand 1: American History – Concept 1: Skills for History, PO 5 specifically requires students to look at multiple perspectives on an issue and examine the author’s analysis. Concept 9: Postwar United States. PO1-d (United States as a superpower - e.g., political intervention and humanitarian efforts) would include U.S. efforts to broker agreements between Israel and the Arab world, such as Jimmy Carter’s Camp David meetings.

Strand 2: World History – Concept 1: Skills for History, PO 5 requires the same analysis of multiple perspectives on an issue as Concept 1, PO 5 in the American history strand. Concept 9: Contemporary World. PO2-c specifically requires teachers to teach about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Strand 3: Civics/Government – Concept 5: Government Systems of the World. PO 2 indicates that students should “describe factors (e.g., trade, political tensions, sanctions, terrorism) that influence United States foreign policy.” U.S. policies with respect to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are at the heart of political tensions and terrorism in the Middle East.

Strand 4: Geography – Concept 4: Human Systems. PO2 and 3 involve the causes and effects of human migration. The return of the Jews to Palestine and the movement of Palestinian refugees after the formation of Israel both provide case studies of these important ideas.

Materials needed for the lesson:

1. Map showing Israel’s borders, Palestinian territories, and the short distance between places. <www.zionismontheweb.org/map_Israel_distances.gif>
2. Historical background sections (“Background to the Conflict” and “Conflict and Compromise since 1948”).

3. Eyewitness accounts (“Israeli Children’s Views” and “Palestinian Children’s Views”)

Procedures/Directions for implementing the lesson:

1. Introduction: 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? When meetings are held between the U.S. and Mexico on border issues, what challenges do the organizers face? (Be sure the students think about the language barrier, the difference in power between the countries, and the fact that Americans hold widely different views on what should be done.) The Palestinian-Israeli conflict also involves two different groups of people living in close proximity to each other. The following lesson will look at the issues dividing the two peoples, differences in opinion within each group, and the challenges of the peace process.

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. Read and discuss the section entitled “Conflict and Compromise since 1948” (3 pages). Discuss. Be sure to pay particular attention to the part on the important issues dividing Israelis and Palestinians. Tell students to use that section as a reference guide when doing the activities that follow.

4. Have students read the eyewitness accounts by various Palestinian and Israeli children. (Note: It is extremely important that students read both the Palestinian and the Israeli accounts. While it would save time to turn half the class into Israelis and half into Palestinians, doing that would undermine the primary objective of having students compare a wide variety of perspectives.) As they read each section, have them briefly note down the issues each child raises. The students could then compare lists. (Some of these issues are: terrorist attacks, soldiers, checkpoints and the “security wall,” Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands, the intifada, Israeli measures to limit Palestinians - curfews, tear gassing crowds, bulldozing of houses, Palestinian refugee camps, and the issue of a separate Palestinian state.)

5. Have students work in groups to research one of the issues mentioned above. (This should be a relatively short process but will require students to have access to the internet – and presupposes that students know how to look for the bias in each source.) The group should get some general background on the issue and explain **both sides’** perspectives, incorporating quotes from the eyewitness accounts.

6. Ask student groups to explain the issue they researched to the class. After each presentation, the class should decide on a summary (not more than a sentence long for each side) of Palestinian and Israeli positions on the issue.

7. Divide students into larger groups/panels (splitting up members of the previous groups among the various “panels”). Each group is a panel of U.S. experts, whose goal is to develop specific recommendations to help resolve some of the issues that have been raised. Students don’t have to “solve” the problems but should choose **three** of the issues discussed in steps 5 and 6 and make a specific suggestion for improvement for each of the issues they choose. Compare the different panels’ suggestions.

Extension activities:

1. Have students read and compare short excerpts from Palestinian author Ibtisam Barakat’s *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007) and Israeli author Amos Oz’s memoir *A Tale of Love and Darkness: A Memoir* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2003). (Excerpts are found in the High School English lesson in this packet.)

2. Direct students to research American involvement in the conflict. Have the students examine the extent to which American policy has promoted peace between Arabs and Israelis and the extent to which U.S. efforts have intensified the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.