



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

# Center for Middle Eastern Studies

## **Palestine/Israel - 1948: Al-Nakba (The Catastrophe) and The War of Independence: One Event, Two Perspectives**

(A lesson within a unit on: Teaching the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict – A Multiple Narratives Approach)

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**Grade Level:** High School or Community College

**Lesson Description:** This lesson is one of the anchor lessons in a 6-week unit on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict that is taught through a **multiple narratives approach**. It is designed as a historical inquiry that students complete in groups. The historical inquiry requires students to read, write, analyze, and discuss various documents, mostly primary sources, that include text, maps, and photos to understand how the events that took place in 1948 were viewed through different perspectives and meant different things to the respective populations.

### **Standards:**

**Students analyze the international developments in the post-World War II world.**

- Understand how the forces of nationalism developed in the Middle East, how the Holocaust affected world opinion regarding the need for a Jewish state, and the significance and effects of the location and establishment of Israel on world affairs.

**Students analyze instances of nation-building in the contemporary world in at least two of the following regions or countries: the Middle East, Africa, Mexico and other parts of Latin America, and China.**

- Understand the challenges in the regions, including their geopolitical, cultural, military, and economic significance and the international relationships in which they are involved.
- Describe the recent history of the regions, including political divisions and systems, key leaders, religious issues, natural features, resources, and population patterns.
- Discuss the important trends in the regions today and whether they appear to serve the cause of individual freedom and democracy.

### **Background Multiple Narratives Pedagogy**

Studying the conflict can be done through a number of ways, but I find that using a multiple narrative approach has been the most successful. It challenges students to learn content, apply critical thinking skills, and synthesize content and analysis to complete various assignments throughout the unit, including the final project. This approach parallels what the **new common core standards** are asking of students. In addition, it asks students to come to their own conclusions and truth given the content they have learned which helps avoid controversy and criticism. It allows educators opportunities to teach students both historical content and important historical thinking skills.

The rationale behind multiple narratives is the attempt to balance the idea of history as a discipline based on facts with history as a collection of human experiences and memories often based on a person's own perspective. Students will be presented with historical facts, as well as be exposed to various perspectives and narratives around the events that have contributed to the ongoing conflict. The idea is to keep students open to outcome because while there are definite

historical facts that they are expected to learn, there are no other specific outcomes expected from students. Although this often challenges students with close ties to the region or who have previously studied the conflict, I also have experienced that they grow as much or more than other students. The multiple narratives approach creates opportunities for students to synthesize the facts with the perspectives and narratives that they have read and learned about and come to a truth or multiple truths about the conflict. I have attempted to use as many primary sources documents, sources, and media as possible.

The unit's final assessments are preparing for a United Nations conference on resolving the conflict and developing a product (writing, art, music, etc) that reflects the student's truth. The conference is very academic in nature and is not a debate, while the truth assignment is more open-ended and allows students an opportunity to express a conclusion(s) they came to through the unit. Students do not present these to the class, unless they want to share. They are hung up in class for other students to see.

Following is a **potential** lesson outline with lesson topics and materials. These are lessons that I have used, although I, like all teachers, continually try to review, renew, and update materials based on the current situation and exposure to new documents and ideas. Additionally, some lessons are not taught to due to time restrictions. I did not include short quizzes I give to check for content mastery and understanding, although they are included in the materials I will share. I encourage educators to use what they think may be helpful or apply materials that already have or new materials they develop to fit into this framework of multiple narratives. I enjoy collaborating with others to develop relevant lessons and to compile documents, especially primary sources, to teach students about this important and often controversial subject.

#### **Lesson Materials:**

- Historical Inquiry Guiding Questions
- Document A - *Al Nakba and The War of Independence* (differentiated for College Prep and Honors classes)
- Document B – *Deir Yassin Massacre*
- Document C – *Israeli Independence* (differentiated for College Prep and Honors classes)
- Document D - *Refugees*
- Document E – *Jews come to their homeland*
- Historical Inquiry Debrief Sheet

**Lesson Context:** This lesson can be taught independently of the unit. I teach it as day 7 of the unit (unit outline attached as a reference). Before students get into studying the events of 1948, we have covered the Balfour Declaration, First Zionist Conference, and the United Nations Partition Plan. The UN Partition Plan sets a good context for looking at the events of 1948. Students look at a map of the partition plan that includes the statistics and have to hypothesize around how and why the committee made the recommendations they did. We discuss what issues the partition plan raises and this sets us up for looking at what happened in 1948.

#### **Lesson Sequence:**

1. Put the following warm-up question on the board: Warm-Up: What issues did the Balfour Declaration, the First Zionist Conference, and the UN Partition plan raise for Palestinians and Jews? . Give students time to think about the question, talk to their peers, and write their responses down. Debrief the question and summarize by asking what the likely reaction to the partition plan would be from each side. Explain that students will work in groups to find out what happened after the UN Special Committee on Palestine put forth their recommendation.
2. Put students in mixed ability groups of 3-4 students. Each student needs a copy of the Historical Inquiry Guiding Questions. Each group will need 5 document folders (A-E). Each folder should have enough copies of the documents so each student can have one. Students should work through the documents in order and complete their historical inquiry guide.
3. As students work through the documents (I have them do this on a block period) but it can be done over two days, the teacher should circulate throughout the room and listen to and prompt the groups. I often listen to students converse about the documents, help interpret maps and pose questions to push their discussion.

4. The next day, put the following warm-up on the board: Warm-Up: List as many FACTS as you can about what happened in 1948. As you record students responses on the board, make sure you discern the actual facts and if students respond with something that is not an actual agreed upon fact, that you stop and ask students to discuss what was offered. This provides a great opportunity to practice with the ideas of fact, perspective, narrative, and truth. You can continue to debrief the document work with asking students what they learned about how one event meant two different things for Palestinians and Jews and how this could be a source of continued conflict.

5. For homework, I number students into ones and twos. The ones are assigned *the Nakba* and the twos *the War of Independence*. They have to find a corresponding picture, and then write two facts about what happened, offer an example of a perspective, write a short narrative, and then offer their truth of that particular event. This is all done on a piece of white 8 ½ x 11 piece of paper. Most students type theirs. This is how I assess their understanding of both the terms and their application and the historical content.

6. Lastly, before moving on to the Six Day War, you can use the 1948 debrief sheet to wrap up the historical investigation and the discussion.

**Attachments:**

- Unit Overview and Lesson Outline
- 1948 Historical Investigation Guiding Questions, Documents, and Debrief Sheet