



Program Resource Pack

Israeli–Palestinian Context

Developed by Avi Posen and Noam Weissman.

Polarized identity politics turn the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a good vs. evil zero-sum game. Seeing one of the sides as “good” demands seeing the other as “evil.” We don’t believe it should be this way.

The Israeli-Palestinian Context series presents a mature outlook on the history of Israel in all its complexity. By exploring the conflict from multiple perspectives, we try to transform radical and superficial opinions into a nuanced understanding – an understanding that leaves hope for a better future for both sides.

After viewing the six videos, use the following resources to further engage your students or participants. The resources include further learning links which include videos, articles, podcasts and books to dig deeper into the subject matter, a glossary of important terms, learning goals, discussion questions, learning activities and reflection questions.

[Link to series](#)

Further Learning

1. Unpacked for Educators:
 - **Zionism:** [What is Zionism?](#), [Why I Am A Zionist](#)
 - **Conflict:** [Palestinians of the West Bank](#), [What are the Israeli Settlements](#), [The Jewish Connection to the Land](#), [Israeli Settlers | Settlements](#), [History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict](#), [The Plight of Palestinian Refugees](#), [Deir Yassin: The Battle for Truth](#) (podcast)
2. [Zioness Resources](#)
3. Yossi Klein Halevi, *Letters to my Palestinian Neighbor* (book)
4. Micah Goodman, *Catch 67* (book)
5. Jewish Virtual Library, [Traditional Narratives of Israeli and Palestinian History](#)



Learning Goals

Episode 1: Can you be Zionist and Progressive?

1. The tribalism that is occurring on college campuses is forcing young people into teams and creating a coarsening of civil discourse.
2. Identity politics and Intersectionality play prominent roles on campus with the interconnectedness of different types of social categorizations playing an important role. Jews in this context are confused, as they are at times viewed as privileged/"the oppressor" and at times as minorities/victims/"the oppressed."
3. On college campuses, Israel is too often seen as aligned with white colonialist states serving to oppress minorities. Jews are in a [paradoxical situation](#) as many align with progressive values, and will often feel very welcomed and part of university society, but are often excluded by virtue of an identity tied to Israel.
4. It's a real challenge for young Jews and non-Jews to have a healthy relationship with Israel on campus. The identity crisis between holding progressive values and supporting Israel is difficult for many as they aren't given a space to co-exist.
5. The topic of Israel and the Palestinians is rarely presented with any nuance on campus, therefore it is essential to bring nuance, different perspectives and the complexities of the conflict into the conversation.
6. One can be both Zionist and progressive. These two values are not mutually exclusive.

Episode 2: Was Zionism a form of Colonialism?

1. There are some who view Zionism as white men from Europe having developed the Zionist project and colonized a land far away, but this is a radical misunderstanding of colonialism and a radical misunderstanding of Zionism.
2. The goal of colonialism has historically been to extend one's hegemony over others and to grow one's empire economically unlike the Zionist project whose aim was to re-establish a national home for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel.
3. The Zionist project was created to provide a safe haven for Jews, to return them to their ancestral homeland and was not done to further the economic goals of any country.



4. The majority of the Jews in Israel are not European, but Mizrahi, of middle eastern and north african descent. European Jews also descend from the Land of Israel as well.

Episode 3: Did Israel Expel Palestinian Arabs?

1. The Palestinian refugee issue came into existence and continues to be an issue for a variety of reasons including:
 - Palestinian Arabs fleeing the violence in 1948
 - Palestinian Arabs being ordered to leave temporarily by Arab forces or radio broadcasts
 - Palestinian Arabs being expelled by pre-state Zionist forces in certain areas
 - Arab countries not resettling the Palestinian refugees
 - The United Nations preserving refugee status through generations for Palestinians through the organization UNRWA
 - Israel not allowing “the right of return” for Palestinian Arabs to their pre-1948 homes in Israel
2. To have a more complete understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it’s critical to learn both the Israeli and Palestinian narratives
3. There were 850,000 Jewish refugees forced from their homes in Muslim countries after Israel was established. Most of them (almost 700,000) were resettled in Israel, and this story is too often neglected.
4. Israel’s birth is commemorated by Palestinians as the Nakba, or the catastrophe. If we want to understand the conflict today, we must learn the history of 1948.

Episode 4: Is Israel an Occupying Power?

1. The term occupation in reference to Israel can have different interpretations and meanings. Depending on who says it, they may be referring to:
 - The entire Land of Israel from the (Jordan) River to the (Mediterranean) Sea
 - The land gained by Israel in 1967
 - The military administration of the Palestinian people but not the land
2. Jews are indigenous to Judea. From historical and biblical records, it’s clear that Jews have always had a deep connection to this land, originating as a people from the land and following exile, including the desire to return in prayers, traditions and through study.



3. People can disagree on whether Israel should be in the West Bank/Judea and Samaria, but to obfuscate the issue by calling Israel an occupier is at best dishonest and at worst destructive as it can conjure up images of the Nazi occupation of countries during WWII.
4. To have a more complete understanding of the current situation, one must look at both Israeli and Palestinian experiences and sources.

Episode 5: Does Israel Act as an Apartheid State?

1. While Israel is not an apartheid state and the comparison to South African Apartheid is dishonest, this lesson will help us understand where the comparison comes from and why charged language like this is dangerous.
2. Many argue that Israel is a colonialist project of European Jews who support discriminatory policies against an indigenous minority—Arabs. This characterization is wrong because the Zionist project was created to provide a safe haven for Jews (Ashkenazi, Mizrahi and others), to return them to their ancestral homeland and was not done to further the economic goals of any country.
3. Israelis of all backgrounds have full and equal rights. Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza are not Israeli citizens and don't share the same rights as other Israelis. Palestinians in Gaza are governed by Hamas and Palestinians in the West Bank are ruled by the Palestinian Authority or Israeli military administration.
4. The struggle of the Palestinian national movement is fundamentally different from that of the African National Congress. Whereas the blacks in South Africa demanded to be equal citizens of their country, the Palestinian national movement is not demanding to be part of the State of Israel, it is demanding either a separation from the State of Israel or a dismantling of the State of Israel..
5. Students will be able to define the term "apartheid," which is often an accusation levied against Israel, but rarely understood.

Episode 6: Who Are Israelis, Really?

1. From a full exploration of the story of Zionism and Israel, students will understand the many achievements and diversity of Israelis.
2. In just over a century, Zionism has created:



- A home for Jewish refugees, a people who many forget had no set home for two millenia.
- Zionism gave Jews the opportunity to stand up straight and enter the world stage as subjects with agency as opposed to objects who stand and fall at the whims of others.
- Zionism and Israel revived a spoken language, Hebrew, in an unprecedented way.
- Israel has become the center of production of Jewish culture and ideas, from the arts to literature to film to Jewish learning.
- Israelis are human beings who are humane, decent, and diverse. And they face difficult human challenges.

Glossary of Terms

- 1. Zionism** - Zionism is the Jewish national movement of self-determination in the land of Israel – the historical birthplace and ancestral homeland of the Jewish people.
- 2. Progressivism** - Progressivism is a way of thinking that focuses on social progress. As an idea, Progressivism generally refers to the belief that government or people acting on its behalf can be used to address social problems, inequalities, or inequities.
- 3. Intersectionality** - A framework for understanding the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.
- 4. Occupation** - International law provides that a situation of occupation is a form of international armed conflict that arises when a territory, or parts thereof, come under the authority of foreign hostile armed forces, even if it is not met with armed resistance
- 5. Colonialism** - The control by one power over a dependent area or people. It occurs when one nation subjugates another, conquering its population and exploiting it, often while forcing its own language and cultural values upon its people.
- 6. Settler-Colonialism** - Settler-colonization is the removal and erasure of Indigenous peoples in order to take the land for use by settlers in perpetuity.
- 7. Indigenous** - The people who originally lived in a place, rather than people who moved there from somewhere else. The term can be understood based on some of the following examples:
 - Self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member.



- Historical continuity in the land
- Distinct social, economic or political systems
- Distinct language, culture and beliefs
- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.

8. Apartheid - International law defines apartheid as establishing and maintaining an institutionalized regime of oppression by one racial group over another. Apartheid South Africa (1948-1994) was a system under which a small minority of whites subjected the majority black population to severe political, economic, and social discrimination. They could not be citizens, vote, or participate in the government, and they were segregated in every aspect of daily life.

Sources: [ADL](#), [International Committee of the Red Cross](#), [United Nations](#), [National Geographic](#), [Time](#), [History](#)

Discussion Questions

- 1.** Social media shares information in small sound bites and images without allowing much room for nuance. What should be done about that? What's the best way to educate oneself and others about complex situations like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
- 2.** How would you explain Zionism to someone who had never heard of the term? Would you explain Zionism by referring to the 19th-century modern political movement to create a Jewish state in Palestine or would you explain the two thousand-year yearning of the Jewish people to return to their ancient homeland, the Land of Israel and have self determination there? What are the implications of explaining Zionism in each of these ways?
- 3.** What are the implications of multiple indigenous peoples living in one land? Why is this such a contentious challenge within the modern State of Israel?
- 4.** During Israel's War of Independence when Arab armies began to retreat, the IDF top brass encouraged Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to conquer the entire West Bank / Judea and Samaria. Ben-Gurion responded by saying "*what sort of country would that give us? We would have a Knesset with an Arab majority. Faced with either a Greater Israel or a Jewish Israel, we choose a Jewish Israel.*" Do you think this is an existential issue for Israel or can Israel remain a Jewish state without having a Jewish majority population? Do you think David Ben-Gurion made the right decision?
- 5.** Words create reality and Israelis and Palestinians are constantly fighting a war of words. Is the West Bank / Judea and Samaria occupied, disputed or liberated? This is similar to



other questions about Israel's history. How should Israel's 1948 war be known as the War of Independence or the Nakba (catastrophe), and does this language influence conversations and policy decisions? How can the use of the word "apartheid" impact the conflict, international diplomacy and public opinion surrounding the conflict?

6. What are the implications of reducing conversations surrounding Israel to the conflict with the Palestinians? Why is it important to understand the accomplishments and diversity within Israeli society?
7. Regarding the definition of "occupation", Micah Goodman, the author of *Catch 67* (p. 104) writes:

"On the one hand, the territories are not stolen land that came under Israel's control by immoral means, so they are not in themselves occupied. On the other, as we have seen, Israel imposes a military rule on a Palestinian population that has no say over the state's decisions, so the Palestinians are a nation that lives under occupation. The conclusion is that the territories are not occupied, but the Palestinian people are."

How do you interpret this definition and what message does it send? Do you agree with this definition or would you change it and if so how?

Learning Activities

1. After watching all [six videos](#), post the questions presented in the series (included below) in different places around the room. Divide your students/participants into small groups and assign each group a different question. Within their groups, they should discuss the question and compile their thoughts. Each group should present three points that were discussed in regards to their question:
 - Can you be a Zionist and a Progressive?
 - Was Zionism a form of colonialism?
 - Is Israel an occupying power?
 - Did Israel expel Palestinian Arabs?
 - Does Israel act as an apartheid state?
 - Who are Israelis, really?
2. After reading this [article](#) that displays both the traditional Israeli and Palestinian narratives, divide your students/participants into groups of five. Each participant should be assigned one of the following questions and share their answer with the other four members of their group:
 - Were there any areas of commonality between the two narratives?
 - What do you think is the best way to bring two sides together who hold drastically different narratives?



- How can two groups look at the same political issue and see it differently? What influences that?
- Do you think less of someone who sees political issues differently than you do? Why or why not?
- How can your life experiences influence your perspective on specific issues?

3. Think Tank:

Imagine you are part of a think tank tasked with finding a solution to the Palestinian refugee problem. The think tank has narrowed it down to three possible solutions:

- Settle all Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Gaza and Arab countries
- Settle Palestinian refugees in a Palestinian state
- Settle Palestinian refugees in Israel

Research each possible solution and make the case for that solution to the rest of the group. Make sure you explain why “your solution” makes the most sense and why the others are less viable options.

Reflection Questions

1. Put yourself in the shoes of a Jewish refugee from Iraq immigrating to Israel upon the establishment of the State of Israel. You’ve just experienced violent antisemitism in your home country and you are now returning to the land of Israel, something you and your family have prayed for for thousands of years. How do you feel upon hearing somebody refer to Zionism as colonialism? Alternatively, put yourself in the shoes of a Palestinian Arab living in Israel before the state was established. Your family has lived in the land for generations and you don’t know another home. How do you feel about the comparison of Zionism to colonialism?
2. When learning about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it’s important to look at both Israeli and Palestinian experiences and sources. Read the following [article](#) and answer the following questions:
 - How do you deal with history vs. narrative?
 - How can two people look at the same political issue and see it differently? What influences that?
 - Do you think less of someone who sees political issues differently than you do? Why or why not?
 - How can your life experiences influence your perspective on specific issues?
3. How does it make you feel to know that Israel’s creation which Jews celebrate as Yom Ha’atzmaut (Israeli Independence Day) is commemorated by another people as their “Nakba”, or catastrophe? Does it take away from the joy of Yom Ha’atzmaut? Can you compartmentalize the two narratives or is this something you disregard altogether?



- 4.** What are the first three things that come to mind when you think of Israel? What are the first three things that come to mind when you think of Israelis? Are the three items the same or different? Reflect on the three items you came up with and why you thought of them first.

- 5.** What does it mean for Israel to be a melting pot versus a mosaic; a melting pot in which multiple identities merge into one identity or a mosaic in which fragments of different identities produce one beautiful tapestry? Which of the two do you think Israel is and which do you think Israel should be?