

UNIT FOUR - The Modern Middle East and the Creation of the State of Israel (19th and 20th Centuries)



LESSON PLAN 10 The Jewish Underground Militias - Haganah, Irgun, and Lechi

OBJECTIVES:

- 1) Explain the key differences between the Haganah, Irgun, and Lechi and their approaches to achieving a Jewish state.
- 2) Analyze the impact of the British White Paper of 1939 and the United Resistance Movement (URM) on Jewish resistance efforts.
- 3) Evaluate the ethical dilemmas posed by the use of violence in the fight for Israeli independence.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

[Main Sources 25](#)

[Video clip: Unpacked for Educator's Pre-IDF Brigades: Haganah, Irgun, and Lechi](#)

ACTIVITIES:

1) Introduction and Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Activity: "Rebel or Terrorist?"

Objective: Get students thinking about how resistance movements are perceived differently depending on perspective.

Display the following question:

"What is the difference between a freedom fighter and a terrorist? Does it depend on who is telling the story?"

Students Think-Pair-Share their thoughts with a partner.

Display images of various historical figures (e.g., Nelson Mandela, George Washington, Menachem Begin) and ask:

- a) "Were they freedom fighters or terrorists? Why?"
- b) "How do the Jewish underground militias fit into this debate?"

Transition: "Today, we will examine how Jewish militias used different strategies to fight for independence and how their actions were perceived by the British, Arabs, and even fellow Jews."

2) Chavruta/Partner Text Study: "Three Perspectives on the Holocaust" (10 minutes)

Objective: Analyze the ideological differences between the Haganah, Irgun, and Lechi.

Divide students into small groups (3-4 per group).

Each group receives a short primary source excerpt from a Haganah, Irgun, or Lechi leader (e.g., *David Ben-Gurion*, *Menachem Begin*, *Avraham Stern*).

Groups read their assigned excerpt and answer:

- a) What is this leader's goal?
- b) What methods do they advocate?
- c) How do they justify their approach?

Groups share their findings, and the class creates a three-column chart comparing the groups' strategies.

3) Class Discussion and Analysis of Texts (7 minutes)

Objective: Connect the underground militias' actions to the broader Zionist movement and the fight for statehood.

Guiding questions:

- a) Why did the Haganah initially support diplomacy with the British, while the Irgun and Lechi pushed for military action?
- b) How did the British White Paper of 1939 impact Jewish militias?
- c) Was the United Resistance Movement (URM) a turning point? Why did it fail?
- d) Why was the King David Hotel bombing so controversial? Did it help or hurt the Zionist cause?

4) Active Engagement Activity 1: Decision-Making Challenge(8 minutes)

"The Strategy Dilemma"

Objective: Have students step into the shoes of Zionist leaders and debate strategy.

Scenario: It's 1946. The British are blocking Jewish refugee ships from reaching Palestine. Jewish leaders must decide how to respond.

Divide the class into three groups:

- a) Haganah Leadership: Argue for continuing diplomacy and supporting the British until Jewish statehood can be negotiated.
- b) Irgun Leadership: Argue for targeted attacks on British infrastructure to weaken their control.
- c) Lechi Leadership: Argue for a full-scale armed uprising against the British.

Each group writes a brief strategy proposal (2-3 points).

Groups present their proposal to the class, explaining their reasoning.

Class vote: Which strategy do they think would be most effective?

5) Active Engagement Activity 2: (7 minutes)

"Agree, Disagree, or Unsure?"

Objective: Encourage students to think critically about historical debates surrounding Jewish resistance.

Post three signs around the room: "Agree," "Disagree," and "Unsure."

Read a series of statements aloud, and students move to the sign that best represents their opinion.

After each statement, a few students from each section share why they chose their stance.

Sample statements:

"The Jewish militias were justified in using violence to fight for statehood."

"The King David Hotel bombing was necessary to drive the British out."

"If the British had not restricted Jewish immigration, Israel would have been established peacefully."

"The Haganah's restraint was the most effective long-term strategy."

6) Reflection and Teacher Wrap-Up - “Rewrite the Headlines” (5 minutes)

Display a historical headline from a British, Jewish, or Arab newspaper about the Jewish militias.

Challenge students to rewrite the headline from another perspective (e.g., a Zionist newspaper vs. a British one).

Closing discussion:

- a) How does perspective shape how we view history?
- b) How do today’s debates about Israel and security connect to these early Zionist divisions?

Exit Ticket:

Before leaving, students complete a 1-minute reflection on an index card:

“Which underground militia’s strategy do you think was most effective and why?”

“Did Jewish resistance during the British Mandate strengthen or weaken the Zionist cause? Explain.”

Further Learning: UED videos and educational resources

1. [Pre-IDF Brigades: Haganah, Irgun, and Lechi](#)
2. [Unpacking Menachem Begin](#)