



Educator's Guide

Prime Ministers: The Clash of Ben-Gurion & Begin

This video explores the philosophies of and relationships between Israel's early prime ministers: David Ben-Gurion and Menachem Begin with a sprinkling of Golda Meir and Yitzhak Rabin. Ben-Gurion and Begin both were proud Zionists, but differed greatly in their approach of how to achieve the Jewish state and ultimately, how to manage and lead Israel. For years, Begin found himself in the opposition government against Meir and Rabin. Yet despite the political differences, arguing, name-calling, and even shooting in one instance, Israel's iconic early leaders harbored deep respect for one another. Is this something we can aspire to today - to respect those with whom we disagree?

Link to video

Review Questions

1. Why did Menachem Begin allow for his ship, the Altalena, to be fired upon without firing back?
2. What did Ben-Gurion think was flawed with Jabotinsky and Begin's brand of Zionism?
3. Before Israel was a state, Begin was the head of _____.
 - a. Hagana
 - b. Lechi
 - c. IDF
 - d. Etzel



4. Did Ben-Gurion see himself as a religious man?

- a.** Yes
- b.** No

5. Who opened fire on the Altalena?

- a.** Yitzchak Rabin
- b.** Yitzchak Shamir
- c.** Golda Meir
- d.** Menachem Begin

Discussion Questions

- 1.** Ben-Gurion once said, "If I knew Begin like I know him now, the face of history would have been different." What do you think he meant by that?
- 2.** How would you explain the strong ideological divide that occurred in the pre-state of Israel between Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky?
- 3.** Why do you think Ben-Gurion and Begin eventually managed to respect each other?
- 4.** The rest of the world assumed a civil war would break out when Israel was established. How was it prevented, and who do you think was the bigger hero--Begin or Ben-Gurion?

Learning Activities

- 1.** Using the prompts below, have a discussion with your class on the following statement: "Respect someone with whom you disagree."
 - a.** How can you still respect someone you disagree with?



- b.** Can you think of current examples of this happening or not happening in current politics/culture?
 - c.** Can you think of any examples when you have respected somebody that you disagreed with?
- 2.** Split your students into two groups. One group will research the [ideology of David Ben-Gurion](#), and the other will research the [ideology of Menachem Begin](#). Have them focus on the following 3 topics:
 - a.** The use of Jewish text and tradition in the formation of Jewish policy
 - b.** Focusing on the past vs focusing on the future
 - c.** Security issues
 - d.** After your students research the topics, have two representatives come to the front of the class from each side to debate the policies of David Ben-Gurion vs. Menachem Begin. Let the Knesset come to life with your students!
- 3.** Engage your students in an [experiential learning activity](#) around the theme of Shalom Bayit, a theme found in the accompanying video.
- 4.** Give your students our [Kahoot](#) on the clash of Ben-Gurion and Begin!

Reflection Questions

- 1.** Although Israeli politicians often argue and scream at each other, they also have personal respect for one another. Are there people in your life who you openly rebuke but deep down admire?
- 2.** Do you identify more with Ben-Gurion's or Begin's brand of Zionism?
- 3.** Albert Einstein warned that Begin "preached an admixture of ultra-nationalism, religious mysticism and racial superiority." Does this dismissal of Begin make Einstein an anti-Zionist or someone who disdains a certain approach to Zionism? How do you think this question is relevant today when criticizing Israeli policies or leaders?



Further Learning

Menachem Begin, *The Revolt*

Dr. Noam Weissman, ["What Can We Learn from the Altalena?"](#)

Primary Source: Center for Israel Education, [Menachem Begin on Whether to Accept Reparations from Germany | CIE](#)

Yehuda Avner, *The Prime Ministers*, pp. 149-150