

A Prism of Israeli Independence Day
Wren Siegel

Subject Areas: Values, Jewish History & Culture, Israel, Jewish Living and Identity, Holidays

Multi-unit lesson plan

Target ages: 7th-12th grade

Objectives: (a) students will explore different perspectives regarding Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israeli Independence Day (b) students will be able to explain why Yom Ha'atzmaut is important and special to Jews and Israelis (c) students will be able to recall facts and demonstrate understanding of main events in the formation of Israel as a country (d) students will be able to describe why someone might *not* think of Israeli Independence Day as positive

Background Information

This unit contains 3 lessons. The first lesson, 'The Berkovitzes,' is a skit about a family who is considering moving to Eretz Yisrael in 1946. The second lesson, '1948,' is a review of a timeline of main events in the formation of Israel as a country. The third lesson, 'Because,' includes key pre- and post questions, with a poem called "Because," that considers different perspectives on history, and having a place called 'home'.

Lesson One: The Berkovitzes

The teacher needs to be prepared with background facts such as these below, from Wiki:

The rise of Nazism in the 1930s led to the Fifth Aliyah, with an influx of a quarter of a million Jews. **This caused the Arab revolt of 1936–1939 and led the British to cap immigration with the White Paper of 1939. With countries around the world turning away Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust, a clandestine movement known as Aliyah Bet (Haganah) was organized to bring Jews to Palestine.**^[47] By the end of World War II, Jews accounted for 33% of the population of Palestine, up from 11% in 1922.^[57] **After 1945, Britain found itself in fierce conflict with the local populace, as thousands of refugees from Europe sought shelter in Palestine and were turned away or rounded up and placed in detention camps.**^[58]

Materials:

- Copies of the script/play below for all students
- A book about WWII that ideally includes a timeline to share with students (See *Resources*)
- dry erase board and markers, or large sheet of paper and markers
- Vocabulary poster, pre-prepared
- Optional: Copy of **The Diary of Anne Frank**
- Optional: fun props such as an apron, fake glasses, pro-Israel signs, army hat, etc.

Steps:

1. *5-6 minutes:* Ask students what they know about WWII. Record relevant facts on board or paper. Establish that it took place from 1939-1945.
2. *5-6 minutes:* Ask students to share what they know about Jews and WWII. Activate background knowledge by asking students what they know about the Holocaust. Some students may have read “A Diary of Anne Frank,” or will at least know of it. Let them know that you are asking them to recall their background knowledge so that they will have better understanding of the play they will read.
3. *3-4 minutes:* Review key vocabulary: *immigration, refugee.* Read definitions that you have prepared on the poster. Check for understanding.
4. *5-6 minutes:* Discuss why Jews were not allowed into “Palestine” – not yet Israel, in the 1940’s. (See wiki info above). Check to make sure students understand the information.
5. Pass out copies of the play to students, and give them about 5-7 minutes to read through it silently.
6. Ask if there are students who connect to any particular role.
7. Assign roles and have those students read the play aloud for the class.
8. Debrief with questions that are included after the play, below.

“Shlamiel’s Famous Meatballs” written by Wren Siegel

Mother: “Where should we move to? We can’t go back to our village, it was destroyed!”

Father: “I heard they have great jobs and there is lots of good work to be found in America!”

Mother: “But there are Jews trying to start a country for the Jewish people called Israel. Shouldn’t we go and help out?”

Older kid: “I want to go to Israel and be in a place that is safe for all Jews!”

Father: “But it is not even legal for us to go there. We would have to sneak in and it would be very dangerous if we got caught trying to get there.”

Mother: “Well we don’t have any family in America. Our 3rd cousin, Shlamiel, is in Israel already!”

Younger kid: “Look! We just got a letter from Shlamiel in the mail!!”

Shlamiel: “Dear Berkovitz family, I really hope you will come visit me here in Eretz Yisrael. Please join me in starting a wonderful new country for our Jewish people! The land is ready to be planted for growing fruit trees and for building homes. We speak Hebrew and we are very determined to fight for our right to have our own country for the Jewish people. You can stay with me, I will cook you my famous meatballs. Please come to Israel and help me start this country for us, the Jewish people. It is our future! We need your help. Love, Shlamiel.

All kids: “Let’s go, let’s go!!”

Parents: “OK, OK – let’s do it!”

Mother: “We’ll contact the Hagana, they’re the ones who help Jews get in to Eretz Yisrael.”

Narrator: “11 months later”

Shlamiel: “Welcome! I’m so glad you made it! Those British soldiers can sure be a pain. You’re going to love it here. I brought you my famous homemade meatballs.”

Everyone: “mmmmmmmmmm”

Shlamiel’s friend: “I am going to join the army forces fighting the British so we can have our country once and for all. I’m tired of the British acting like they are in charge around here.”

Shlamiel’s other friend: “I’ll join you, I want to fight to help Israel become a country!”

Narrator: “In Tel Aviv, one year later”

David Ben Gurion: “I hereby declare the Independence of the State of Israel on this day, **May 14th 1948.”**

Israelis: “Yeeeeaaaaaahhhh!!!!!!”

Israeli #1: “We have our Jewish homeland!”

Israeli #2: “Its been 2,000 years since we were able to live freely on our land!”

Israeli #3: “Its so great to be in Eretz Yisrael, let’s celebrate!!”

Outcome: Conduct a debrief session to solidify and assess student understanding of the material they read. Here are some debrief questions:

1. What key event in the 1940’s caused Jews to become refugees? (The Holocaust, WWII)
2. Why weren’t Jews allowed to enter Palestine legally by the British? (There was already a lot of conflict with the Arabs, and the British thought this was a way to keep it from getting worse).
3. How did Jews deal with this problem? (They had a secret group, the Haganah, that helped sneak Jews into Palestine, but it was very dangerous).
4. Why would Jews have wanted to get into Palestine when it was so dangerous to try and go, if the British caught them? (Can students describe why Jews wanted to risk their safety to get to Israel before it became a country?)

Lesson Two: 1948

The goal of this lesson is to build students’ background information and knowledge about Israel’s history before conducting lesson three, within the context of ‘home’ and what that concept means. The teacher will need to review the information first. There are key facts you want students to be able to remember and recall for lesson 3. These facts came from various articles on Wikipedia, cited in the *Resources* section.

They are:

- In 1947, the United Nations approved a plan to divide Palestine into two states, one Arab and one Jewish
- The Jewish community accepted the plan, the Arab community did not
- Attacks began between the two groups of people

- On May 14, 1948, the Jewish Agency proclaimed independence, naming the country Israel
- The next day five Arab countries (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq) attacked Israel, starting the 1948 Arab-Israeli War
- In the three years following the 1948 war, 700,000 Jews settled in Israel. (Around 136,000 came as displaced Jews of World War II. Most others were part of the 758,000 to 900,000 Jews who fled or left Arab countries following anti-Jewish attacks.
- The early years of Israel were marked by a mass immigration of Holocaust survivors and Jews who were persecuted in Arab lands. Most arrived as refugees with no possessions and were housed in temporary camps.
- The 1948 Palestinian exodus also known as *Nakba*, meaning the "disaster" or "catastrophe", occurred when between 650,000 and 750,000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were forced from their homes by Israeli forces, during the creation of the state of Israel and the civil war that preceded it.

Additional background information:

Wikipedia: [UN Resolution 194](#)

In December 1948, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 194 which declared (amongst other things) that in the context of a general peace agreement "refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so" and that "compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return." However, parts of the resolution were never implemented, resulting in the Palestinian refugee crisis.

Materials:

See Resources list of books. It will be important to have at least 2-3 of these books on hand for this lesson as resources. You will use the same books, maps, and any photographs you collect for Lesson 3 as well.

- Map of Israel and the West Bank
- Photographs of Jerusalem, the West Bank, Israel
- Vocabulary poster (*immigration, refugee*)
- Index cards, markers

Pre-lesson preparation:

Put one of each key facts on a separate index card

Steps

1. Ask students, "What does home mean to you?" Ask them what their attitude is towards their home, and how it might feel to lose their home. They can do a paired share.
2. Provide students with a map of Israel that shows the West Bank and introduce the lesson as the history of the creation of Israel as a country.
3. Give students the index cards and tell them they will need to put the events in order as a group.
4. Give each student one card. In order to place their card where they think it belongs, the whole group has to agree first.
5. Give students a time limit, such as 15-20 minutes. At this point, assess progress and discuss. Give more time as needed, but beware not to spend too much time on this portion.
6. Discuss the events and order the students put them in. Make any corrections and discuss events/cards that could be in more than one place.
7. Open up a "Q&A" forum. What facts/events do students have questions about? Discuss the idea that our knowledge of history depends on events as recorded and researched by people.

8. KEY QUESTIONS:

What facts *could be* reported differently, *depending on who* is recording the fact, a Jew or a Palestinian Arab in 1948?

What themes do you notice between the events?

The teacher should guide the discussion towards these ideas:

- Both Jews and Arabs lost their homes, in Europe and Palestine respectively.
- Jews were refugees of WWII, Palestinian Arabs were refugees of the 1948 Arab Israeli War.
- How might it feel to be a refugee?

Ask students to consider the last question carefully, and to share with a partner. Then do a share out with the whole group.

Assessment/Outcome

Put the cards away, and ask students to verbally recall the events and facts as they remember them. Let them know they will need to recall this information for the next lesson. Encourage students to ask their parents about what they know of Israel's creation as a country.

Lesson Three: Because

The poem “Because” was shared with me by Rabbi Tirzah Firestone for use with the B’nei Mitzvot education program “Crossing the River.” The author is Andrea Cohen-Kiener. **Do not reproduce or reprint for any purposes other than this lesson.** Make sure you pre-read the poem and that you feel your students are ready to discuss it. The goal of the lesson is *not* to take sides, but to consider empathy and compassion for “the other.’ Ultimately, you want students to be able to describe a Palestinian viewpoint of Israeli Independence Day.

Materials:

Copies of poem for each student

Highlighters

Map of Israel and the West Bank

Photographs of Jerusalem, the West Bank, Israel

Vocabulary poster: immigration, refugees

Background Knowledge

From article on Wiki: [Palestinian refugees](#)

“Although there is no accepted definition of who can be considered a Palestinian refugee for legal purposes, UNRWA defines them as "persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict". UNRWA's definition of a refugee also covers the descendants of persons who became refugees in 1948. This comes in contrast to the standard definition of refugee as defined by UNHCR. Today the number has grown to over 4 million, one third of whom live in the West Bank and Gaza; slightly less than one third in Jordan; 17% in Syria and Lebanon (Bowker, 2003, p. 72) and around 15% in other Arab and Western countries.

Steps

- 1. Ask students if they’ve ever been in a conflict at school where each person had a very different story of the same events. What was that like? How was it resolved?**

- 2. Look at a map of Israel and the West Bank. Ask students what they know about Palestinians. Let them know that you are not looking for specific answers.**

3. Refer to the vocabulary poster and the word ‘refugee.’ Compare/contrast this definition with the one above under background knowledge which you can read aloud. How are the definitions similar and different?

4. Vocabulary in poem that you may want to review before reading:
Vagaries, immoral

5. Frame the poem by telling students that you want them to reflect on it silently when you are done reading for about 2 minutes. First, ask students to close their eyes and get into a comfortable position, then read the poem aloud to them. When finished, give students about 2 minutes of silent reflection time.

6. Now hand out copies and read it aloud together.

7. Finally, have students read it silently to themselves. Students should highlight any words or phrases that stick out to them as interesting or something that they connect with.

8. Check for understanding and ask them if there are any phrases they are unsure of.

9. Discuss the line, “*Because I need to feel at home in this place*” What is the author trying to communicate? Record ideas on a big piece of paper. Repeat with the line, “*Because I want to move freely in my land...*”

10. What is it like to try and understand someone else’s very different point of view about a situation? What is challenging about that?

Assessment/Outcome: Students can write or describe what its like to try and understand someone else’s point of view or experience. Students can describe what a Palestinian viewpoint of Israeli Independence Day may be.

“Because...” by Andrea Cohen-Kiener

Because I love these hills, this landscape these deer and rivers and vines – I understand why you do.

Because I need to feel at home in this place – I understand why you do.

Because the life stories of my people bring me here, hold me here, I understand that yours do.

Because I remembered this place and felt attached to it even when I wasn't here – I understand that you did too.

Because the vagaries of history have convinced me that I need to be here, with secure borders and a national identity – I understand that you do too.

Because – when I have felt afraid of you – I have imagined that you are a beast, somehow inhuman, I understand that you have imagined me this way too.

Because my fear has brought me to act in ways that were powerful but immoral and cruel, I understand that yours has done so too.

Because I have felt alone, abandoned by the world's nations, I understand the additional burden of feeling alone in your suffering.

Because my ancestors are buried in these hills, I understand why the graves of your people are a sacred magnet for you.

Because I want to move freely in my land and grow and raise my children and my tomatoes and my spirit in freedom and health in this place, I know that you need this too.

My need does not cancel yours. My need helps me know yours.

RESOURCES

Websites

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WWII>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_Arab-Israeli_War

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Naqba

Books

Homeland: The Illustrated History of the State of Israel by Marv Wolfman, Mario Ruiz, and William J. Rubin

Understanding the Holy Land: Answering questions about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, by Mitch Frank

A Young Person's History of Israel by David Bamberger

WWII, DK Eyewitness Books by Simon Adams