



THE BEVERLY GOLDSTICK Z" L CURRICULUM
For 21st Century Learning

ANSHE EMET SYNAGOGUE

AES 8th Grade Israel Education

AES 8th Grade Israel Education

This curriculum has been updated and expanded for the 2026-2027 school year.

Lesson 1: Israeli Current Events

Note to the Educator:

Last year in 7th grade, students learned about the Zionist movement and the first 50 years of Israel's history. Those lessons set the foundations for an ambitious scope for the journey you and your class will embark on this year. As the study of Israel's history moves into more modern, immediate times, our focus will turn directly to each of our learners.

Classroom discussions and activities throughout the year will hinge on questions of personal meaning and connection:

- How do I relate to all of this?
- What does Israel mean to me?
- How does my connection to Israel interact with all the other parts of my life?

The study of history always matters, and it matters even more in light of the challenging, event-filled times we're living in today. By deepening students' understanding of the events that led to the present day, their study of current events will reflect a deeper, richer understanding of the context in which today's news unfolds.

Students will talk about current events in Israel regularly. The goal is that they will become oriented to what is happening in Israel and the Middle East today, will know where to look for reliable information, and will be able to articulate more than one perspective on those events.

- At the end of each class meeting, one student will be assigned to bring two news stories that address an event or phenomenon impacting Israel for discussion at the next meeting. Encourage students to cast a wide net in terms of media sources and also

topics, and plan to allocate 5-10 minutes at the start of each session to the current events stories they bring.

- Students should use the media consumption skills in this lesson as they select a topic and articles to share with the class. In addition to mainstream media outlets, encourage them to think about social media posts and other kinds of media that they know about or rely on.

This is a template for current events discussions. You will need to define the scope of each session based on the news of the day, and select the sources to be studied.

Begin by asking how students get news about what's happening in Israel and the Middle East. Presumably their answers will include social media (as general as "Tik Tok" and as specific as certain posters or influencers.) Acknowledge the important role social media plays in our lives, and encourage students to look to more mainstream news organizations as well, and to consider the perspective of each source they rely on.

Be careful to keep your personal opinions at bay: our goal is for students to develop their own ideas and opinions by exploring more than one perspective.

Select a variety of articles, social media posts, and/or videos that address the same or overlapping topics from different perspectives. This can include US outlets, Israeli outlets, and sources from elsewhere.

- Suggested Israeli news sources:
 - <http://timesofisrael.com/>
 - <https://www.haaretz.com/>
 - <https://www.jpost.com/>
 - <https://www.ynetnews.com/>
- Suggested American news sources:
 - CNN

- MSNow
 - Fox
 - The New York Times
 - Washington Post
- Choose a few articles on the same topic from various sources in advance.
 - o Always stress ways in which the topic relates to a piece of Israeli history that students have already studied or will be studying
 - o Try to choose articles that offer different opinions or perspectives on the story. Seeing more than one perspective on the same issue is very helpful for your students! Note that this doesn't always mean different opinions within Israel; an Israeli report on an event impacting Israel will inevitably have a different perspective than an American report on the same event.
 - o Some sessions might focus on how a particular holiday is celebrated in different parts of Israeli society, or on something happening in Israeli culture.
 - Challenge students to consider the different ways the event or story is reported.
 - o You can have students read about the same event from different sources or split them up into groups and let each group share what they learned.
 - o Discerning the subtleties between different authors' reporting of the same "objective information" is a critical skill for discerning readers of Israel news.
 - Allow for some quiet reading so students can concentrate on the articles and complete graphic organizer comparing two sources.
 - Students should be answering the following questions:
 - o What is this article about?
 - o What is the main point?
 - o Who is it about?
 - o Why is it important?
 - o Does it have any effect on the American Jewish community?

- o What kind of bias or perspective is reflected in the report?
- o How is this event covered in American news outlets or in other Middle Eastern outlets?
- o What are two or more perspectives on the same issue: where do they agree and disagree?
- o Having read more than one take on the issue, what do you think?

With these questions in mind, give students time to read and then facilitate a discussion that begins with sharing of what they read and moves into some of the ideas and connections students make as they process the information.

Learning Outcomes:

At the conclusion of the lesson, students will:

1. Feel familiar with recent Israeli events
2. Know where to look for reputable reporting about Israel
3. Understand that different authors/news outlets each put their own spin on events
4. Understand the significance of different terms for the same events or locations (War of Independence vs. Nakba, West Bank vs. Judea and Samaria, etc.)
5. Be able to articulate more than one perspective on the same event
6. Feel empowered and informed enough to share their own opinion

Lesson 2: Review and Context

Note to the Educator:

It shouldn't come as a surprise to you that many of your students will not volunteer much information about what they learned last year. Our hope is that by sparking students' individual and collective memory, you'll set the scene for the deep exploration of contemporary Israel and its place in their lives. Try to keep this session light and positive, employing a "finish the sentence" or multiple choice approach to helping the group gain access to their memory of what was studied last year.

Open the session with a student's current events update. Acknowledge that it's not easy to be the first presenter, and encourage the rest of the class to ask questions and engage in a brief discussion based on the sources that have been shared.

Next, launch into a lighthearted effort to review what everyone retained from their studies about Israeli history last year.

There are many ways to do this. A simple approach would be to ask students to "shout out" things they remember. Turn it into a game by printing event titles on cards, giving a set to each of two groups of students, and asking them to organize the cards in chronological order. Allow students to use the Internet to check their work, and then challenge each group to recount a detail about each event.

- Be prepared to offer "hints" or "reminders" about some of the key points covered in 7th grade:
 - Remind them about what they learned about the Zionist movement and efforts to establish and build an independent Jewish state in Israel.
 - The Balfour Declaration (1917)
 - The United Nations Partition Plan (1947)

- Declaration of Independence and the war that followed (1948)
- Aliyot
- 1967 Six Day War
- 1973 Yom Kippur War
- 1993 Oslo Accords

Try to make this more than just an oral quiz of what people remember (it's likely they won't admit to remembering much at all!) When it comes to sharing details about each event, you can turn into something of a "finish the sentence" kind of game: "In 1947, the United Nations voted to.... What did they vote to do??" and so on.

Once the group has brought their understanding as far on the timeline as they covered last year, pose a different question:

- Who knows what Zionism is?
 - Engage the class in a brief discussion about the early Zionists, who were committed to establishing a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. Back then, and until relatively recently, Zionism was widely understood to be "the national liberation movement of the Jewish people."
- Has anyone heard the term Zionism used in other contexts?
 - Build on any negative connotations students have encountered and acknowledge that in recent years - especially since October 7, 2023 - Zionism has become a "dirty word" in some circles, and identifying as a Zionist is seen by some critics of Israel as something to be condemned.
- Some people have been saying for years that the term is outdated and unnecessary. If Zionism was the movement to establish a Jewish state, maybe it should have been retired in 1948 when the state was established.
- But it's still around, and it's not going anywhere. So maybe our goal should be to understand what it means - to each of us individually, as well as to anybody we encounter who uses it for good or for bad.

EXTRA CREDIT: If you want to dive deeper, ask students to read [this article](#) from the editor of Moment Magazine and engage in a discussion about it.

Now, share seven maps of Israel and ask students to analyze how the country's borders have changed over time:

Note to the Educator:

Questions to pose as students study the series of maps include:

- What do you notice?
- What questions come to mind?
- How is this map different than the other maps we've studied?

- [The Kingdom of David and Solomon](#) (roughly 1000 BCE) - This map is different than all the others, and is intended to provide context on the ancient connection of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel. You might remind students that the stories in the Bible take place mostly in and around present-day Israel. We're about to leap forward thousands of years, to the 20th century, but the Jews' connection to the land dates back more than 3,000 years.
- [1947 UN Partition Plan](#): Ask what they notice about the plan the United Nations approved to create two states for two peoples. Points to highlight include:
 - The plan was powered by the UN's belief that the two sides would never get along so must be separated.
 - The borders were determined primarily by where the different peoples - Jews and Arabs - were living, with a goal of creating a Jewish state with as many Jews as possible and as few Arabs as possible - and an Arab state with as many Arabs as possible and as few Jews as possible.
 - Most of the southern part of the territory was allotted to the Jewish state; most of this area was uninhabitable desert.

- No territorial contiguity: In order to get from one place to another, people would need to cross multiple international borders.
- Jerusalem - holy to Jews and Arabs alike - would be an international city, not part of either new state. In order to reach it from the Jewish state, people would need to travel through the Arab state.
- Despite the shortcomings, the Jews living in the land accepted the plan, and the Arabs rejected it, setting the scene for war when the British left in 1948.
- [1949 Armistice Lines](#): Ask students to compare the UN plan with the 1949 armistice lines. What differences do they see?
 - The armistice lines made Israel much bigger, but still very small and vulnerable. Point out the 9-mile width of the country north of Tel Aviv. You might note that the Northwestern University football stadium, Ryan Field, is about 9 miles from Anshe Emet.
- [1967 Borders](#): In the 1967 Six Day War, Israel tripled its size after seizing territory from Egypt to the south, Jordan to the east, and Syria to the north.
 - What do students notice about these new borders?

Note to the Educator:

While looking at the 1967 map, this is a good time to review what we learned last year about the Six Day War, which was a major milestone in Israel's history. Note the narrow midsection of the pre-1967 map - just nine miles wide at Netanya, north of Tel Aviv - and remind them that the Old City of Jerusalem, including the Western Wall, was under Jordanian control and off-limits to Israelis and Jews. In the war, which unfolded quickly - in just six days! - Israel conquered territory from Syria in the north, Jordan in the east, and Egypt in the west. While Israel returned most territory to Egypt in exchange for peace (more on that later), the final status of the West Bank (conquered from Jordan and home to 2.5 million Palestinians) and Gaza (conquered from Egypt and home to more than 2 million Palestinians) have not yet been determined.

- [Israel's Borders Today](#): This map shows the current borders of Israel. In exchange for peace with the largest Arab country, Egypt, Israel in 1979 agreed to return all of the Sinai Peninsula. In 2005, Israel withdrew unilaterally from Gaza (which we'll discuss later this year). The Oslo process (which we learned about last year) did not yield a final resolution of the status of the West Bank. And Israel continues to maintain sovereignty over the Golan Heights, despite Syria's demand that it be returned. While the United States recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights in 2019, the rest of the world does not recognize Israel's claim.
- Three present-day maps - one showing Israel with the West Bank and Gaza delineated, one showing Israel from the river to the sea, and one showing Palestine from the river to the sea. Address the different maps depicting the situation today: Note that one map shows the West Bank as being an integral part of Israel while another shades it differently, as an indication that the territory's final status has not been resolved. The map we choose can say a lot about how we view the situation. Ask students how they feel when they see the map of Palestine, with no mention of Israel?

The discussion about the Golan Heights and the West Bank provides an excellent segue to the final part of today's lesson: the importance of acknowledging and understanding different perspectives, or narratives. Israel claims to be the sovereign over the Golan Heights. The US agrees, but Syria and the rest of the world don't. We don't have to agree with Syria - or with Israel for that matter! - but it's important to learn about different narratives. As for the West Bank: calling it by its biblical name - Judea and Samaria - has a very different connotation than calling it "occupied territory."

- Do you know why it's even called the West Bank? It lies west of the Jordan River, and from 1949 until 1967 Jordan, which lies east of the Jordan River, claimed sovereignty. To differentiate between the area and the rest of Jordan, it was referred to as the West Bank. But the entire sovereign state of Israel lies west of the river.

This is important in all parts of our lives, and especially in learning about Israel. We may talk about the 1948 War of Independence. Indeed, many Israelis and Jews say it was a miracle. But for 700,000 Palestinian Arabs who lost their homes in 1948, it was a catastrophe. In fact, that's what the Palestinians call the war: Nakba, which is Arabic for "catastrophe."

In our studies this year, we're going to learn about a wide range of perspectives on Israel - including perspectives that some of us may not like. It's totally okay to not agree, but it's totally important to understand.

Note to Educator: At the end of class, select a volunteer (or assign one!) to present next week's current events update. Remind the class that it's important to bring multiple perspectives from multiple mainstream and/or social media outlets. If you want the topic to relate to the class lesson, add specific instructions.

Learning Outcomes:

At the conclusion of the lesson, students will:

1. Have a better recollection of past learning
2. Be able to navigate maps of Israel
3. Understand the concept of Zionism
4. Appreciate the importance of multiple perspectives - even those which we don't like
5. Begin thinking about the place of Israel in their lives

Lesson 3: Highs and Lows

Note to the Educator:

In this session, students will learn about the highs and lows of Israel's history by examining two key milestones: the 1979 Camp David Accords that brought peace between Israel and Egypt, and the 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. By beginning with a few questions that challenge students to think about their own lives, you'll help them consider how the events under discussion resonate for them personally.

Start with the student-led current events update.

Open the session by asking everyone to think about one of the most exciting or uplifting moments of their lives. Some may mention their bar or bat mitzvah, an epic family trip, or an award or championship game they experienced.

Next, ask the students to think about one of the worst, or saddest, moments of their lives. While it's important to ask everyone to share their high points, make clear that nobody needs to share their low points unless they want to. Whether they share with the class or not, ask them to keep both of their personal milestone moments in mind as we explore two parallel moments in Israel's history.

Explain that we will watch two short videos that tell about two key moments in Israel's history: the 1979 Israel-Egypt peace treaty, and the 1995 assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Ask everyone to jot down notes and answers to the questions on the worksheet as the videos are being screened.

Israeli History: Highs and Lows

1979 Peace Treaty

Who was the peace treaty between?

Why do you think this treaty was such a high point in Israeli history?

How did the Israeli public view Egyptian President Anwar Sadat?

Why do you think these two leaders were able to make peace?

What do you think motivated the two leaders to make peace?

- Menachem Begin
- Anwar Sadat

1995 Assassination of PM Yitzhak Rabin

How did Israelis view the Oslo process?

How did Israelis view Yasser Arafat?

Why did some Israelis oppose Oslo?

What is most shocking about the assassination?

Does the assassination tell us anything about the chances for peace?

In what ways were the 1979 and 1993 treaties similar?

In what ways were they different?

The first video, [Egypt and Israel: A Lasting Peace?](#), needs no introduction. As you prepare to hit Play, be sure everyone has a worksheet and a writing utensil.

After the video, use the first two questions on the worksheet to facilitate a brief discussion. It's okay if the conversation expands to include the other questions.

As you introduce the second video, [The Life and Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin](#), share a bit of background. Note that he was born in pre-state Israel in 1922, and spent decades in the IDF, where he rose to the very top, serving as Chief of General Staff. He entered politics and served as prime minister in the mid-1970s. In 1992, he was elected to a second term as prime minister, taking the helm of a country that was tired of war and - though skeptical - open to the possibility of expanding the Israel-Egypt peace treaty to including the Palestinians, much closer to home. Begin the video at 7:05 and show it till the end.

Use the questions on the worksheet to power a discussion about this low point in Israeli history. Pick up on the comment about the moment of the assassination being, for Israelis, like the assassination of JFK for Americans. "If you ask your grandparents where they were when JFK was shot, they'll remember. If you ask your parents where they were on 9/11, they'll remember. If you ask Israelis where they were when Rabin was shot, they'll always remember."

Note that as the peace deal with Egypt was being negotiated and signed, it was very popular among most Israelis, who viewed it as a long-dreamed-of acceptance of the country in the region. Contrast this to the deep divisions in Israeli society about the Oslo Accords: many Israelis were thrilled that an end to the conflict with the Palestinians might be in sight, while many others feared any move toward recognizing the PLO was reckless and dangerous.

Ask students to consider how these two milestones comprise part of one long story, reminding them that their own stories have highs and lows, and so do countries.

If the conversation veers into more current headlines, you might conclude by asking the group whether the current developments feel like highs, lows, or something else.

Note to Educator: At the end of class, select a volunteer (or assign one!) to present next week's current events update. Remind the class that it's important to bring multiple perspectives from multiple mainstream and/or social media outlets. If you want the topic to relate to the class lesson, add specific instructions.

Learning Outcomes:

At the conclusion of the lesson, students will:

1. Understand the significance of the 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt
2. Appreciate the deep divisions in Israeli society around the Oslo Accords
3. Begin to see lasting ripple effects of 1979 and 1993 that continue to shape Israel until today
4. Begin to consider the highs and lows that together create history

EXTRA CREDIT: If you want to offer opportunities for students to dive deeper, share links to two speeches:
Egyptian President Anwar Sadat [addresses](#) the Israeli Knesset, November 20, 1977.
US President Bill Clinton [delivers](#) a eulogy at the funeral of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, November 6, 1995

Lesson 4: The 2000 Camp David Summit and the Second Intifada

Note to the Educator:

In this session, students will delve into key events from the very beginning of the 21st century. These events marked a major turning point, as Israeli-Palestinian relations veered from a path to reconciliation toward a reality that may feel much more familiar to students today. Encourage them to explore each document with an open mind, and to consider the events as they played out at the time, in addition to thinking about them in the context of what they know has transpired more recently.

Start with the student-led current events update.

As we begin to explore the pivotal moments in Israel's history, help the class embrace the mindset of the times by exploring the time period. Ask:

- What was happening in the year 2000?

Since this was well before the students were born, give students several minutes to Google what was going on in the world in 2000.

- Who was president of the US?
- What new technologies came out?
- What major world events happened?

To understand what is going on in Israel now, it's important to understand the events of the early 21st century in Israel and the Middle East.

Take a look at [this video](#) from President Bill Clinton's press conference before the Camp David negotiations started.

Questions to discuss:

- What goals did President Clinton set out?
- What realistic expectations did he acknowledge?
- What consequences did he lay out?

- From what you know about the conflict, was he correct?

Read together:

- These [excerpts](#) from the journal entry of Israel's lead negotiator at the summit:
- This [summary](#) of the outcomes of the summit, from the ADL

Discuss:

- What happened?
- Were peace negotiations achieved?

The Second Intifada

Soon after the Camp David Summit ended in failure, the reality on the ground in the region took a sharp turn, as violence overshadowed the hopes for peace that had prevailed earlier.

Watch [this video](#) as an overview on the Second Intifada.

Discussion:

- Do you think Ariel Sharon should have visited the Temple Mount?
Why or why not?

Student Reflection:

The time of the Second Intifada was a time of extreme stress and anxiety for Israelis; terrorist attacks were happening frequently Israelis felt they were taking risks by going shopping, eating out, or riding the bus. Tourism to Israel tanked

Take a few minutes to write down your thoughts on what it must have been like to live in this kind of fear

Wrap up:

- Do a quick whip-around and ask each student to share something new that they learned or a question they still have.

Supply Needs:

- Writing supplies

Note to Educator: At the end of class, select a volunteer (or assign one!) to present next week's current events update. Remind the class that it's important to bring multiple perspectives from multiple mainstream and/or social media outlets. If you want the topic to relate to the class lesson, add specific instructions.

Learning Outcomes:

At the conclusion of the lesson, students will:

1. Know important key points in modern Israeli history including the 2000 Camp David Summit and the Second Intifada
2. Understand how these key points affect what is happening today in Israel

Lesson 5: Gaza Disengagement and the Second Lebanon War

Note to the Educator:

This lesson offers an opportunity to delve into two seminal, challenging events in Israel's history: the 2005 Gaza Disengagement and the 2006 Second Lebanon War. Both have significant ramifications that continue to shape events in the Middle East today. As you facilitate class work and discussions today, encourage students to consider how what they are learning helps them understand current news about Israel.

Start with the student-led current events update.

Gaza Disengagement

In August, 2005, Israel completed a unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, which it had controlled since the 1967 Six Day War. The tiny patch of coastal land was home to about 1.6 million Palestinians and 8,000 Israeli civilians. Watch [this video](#) from Ariel Sharon's statement on the withdrawal.

Questions for Discussion:

- What was Israel giving up?
- What was Israel hoping to gain?
- How were Israelis affected by this move?
- What was complicated about withdrawing from Gaza?
- Why was it not just as easy as having no more control over Gaza?

Suggested Activity:

Listening to Different Perspectives

Split group up. Assign each group a different perspective to hear

Listen to these reports from NPR:

- [A Palestinian perspective](#) on the withdrawal
- [The view](#) of an Israeli guard hired to help keep the peace between settlers and the IDF
- [An IDF officer](#) discusses the situation

- [A Palestinian Legislative Council member](#) expresses his view on the withdrawal
- [An Israeli family](#) that must evacuate:

Have each group answer the following questions, then bring back together as a group to share

- What perspective did you hear?
- How did they feel about the withdrawal/disengagement?
- How do they feel about their future?

Where are the settlers now?

Time permitting, watch [this video](#) or read [this article](#) to learn about perspectives of Israelis who were compelled to leave their homes in Gaza.

Time, permitting, you may want to screen [this 12-minute video](#) from Unpacked that provides a solid overview of issues surrounding the Gaza Disengagement.

The Second Lebanon War

Provide a very brief overview of the Second Lebanon War:

During the first months of 2006, rising tensions between Israel and Hezbollah (the “Party of God,” operating out of Lebanon with the backing of Iran) culminated in a Hezbollah cross-border attack on July 12, 2006, in which three IDF soldiers were killed and others were wounded. Two severely injured IDF soldiers were kidnapped to Lebanon, where they died. Three more IDF soldiers died in the military actions following the attack.

Israel launched a massive military operation aimed at repatriating the two kidnapped soldiers and eliminating the threat from Hezbollah. After 34 days of fighting, in which 121 IDF soldiers and 49 Israeli civilians were killed, as well as an estimated 600 Hezbollah fighters, a ceasefire took hold.

Read together the text of [U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701](#):

- What does the resolution call for?
- Who does it want to take action?

Research

Time permitting, have students work individually or in pairs to discover how the Second Lebanon War ended. Direct them to [this resource](#), and encourage them to find other sources as well. After 10 minutes of research, ask students to share their findings.

Personal Story

Take a few minutes to learn about [Michael Levin](#) (also [here](#)), an American-born IDF Lone Soldier from Philadelphia who was killed in Lebanon.

Wrap-Up

Take a moment to wrap up

Ask the students to do a quick whip around and share something new they learned or a question they still have

Note to Educator: At the end of class, select a volunteer (or assign one!) to present next week's current events update. Remind the class that it's important to bring multiple perspectives from multiple mainstream and/or social media outlets. If you want the topic to relate to the class lesson, add specific instructions.

Learning Outcomes:

At the conclusion of the lesson, students will:

1. Be able to explain the events that led to the Gaza Disengagement/Withdrawal and the Second Lebanon War
2. Explore different viewpoints expressed by Israelis about the Gaza withdrawal

Lesson 6: Operation Cast Lead (2008-2009) and Operation Pillar of Defense (2012)

Note to the Educator:

Today's lesson underscores that the challenge of tense relations between Israel and Gaza is not new. Students will use critical thinking skills to consider the current implications of decades-old conflicts. Working in small groups to prepare engaging presentations, they will hone their research and presentation skills while drawing connections between history and the present day.

Start with the student-led current events update.

Next, review where we left off on the timeline in our last meeting:

- Review Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005:
 - Dismantling Jewish settlements and moving residences
 - Hamas seized control over the Gaza Strip in 2007

Today, we're going to engage in a group research lab. The class will be divided into two groups. Each will study one significant event in the ongoing tense relationship between Israel and Gaza. Each group will prepare and deliver a two-minute presentation about "their" event. By the end of the session, we should all have a better understanding of Operation Cast Lead and Operation Pillar of Defense.

First, a bit more background to help us all understand the context:

- From 2006-2008, there were ongoing rocket attacks into southern Israel, especially the town of Sderot
 - As [this video](#) explains, Sderot residents had only fifteen seconds to rush to safety when incoming rockets were detected.

- The Jewish National Fund created a safe indoor playground where children could keep busy without worrying about ongoing attacks.

Split the class into two groups to learn about two significant operations by the Israel Defense Forces: Operation Cast Lead and Operation Pillar of Defense

- Have students create a PowerPoint or Padlet to explain what happened and answer the following questions:
 - What led up to the operation?
 - Were there casualties?
 - What was the international reaction?
 - Did the operation succeed?
 - What have been the ongoing consequences from the military operations?

Here are some sources to start with, but encourage students to find others. Make sure to note where they are coming from and what perspective or bias students detect from each source.

- [Operation Cast Lead](#)
- [Operation Pillar of Defense](#)

Tell the class how much time they have to work in their research groups (about 20 minutes) and remind them that the group will share their Padlet or slides to the entire class.

Facilitate a discussion around each of the presentations. Encourage students to think critically as they prepare and deliver their presentations, and as they watch the other group's presentation.

Questions you might pose:

- What similarities do you see in these two operations?
- What differences do you see?
- What can we learn about the present day from this exercise?

- What lingering questions do you have?

Note to Educator: At the end of class, select a volunteer (or assign one!) to present next week's current events update. Remind the class that it's important to bring multiple perspectives from multiple mainstream and/or social media outlets. If you want the topic to relate to the class lesson, add specific instructions.

Learning Outcomes:

At the conclusion of the lesson, students will:

1. Know important key points in modern Israeli history, such as Operation Cast Lead and Operation Pillar of Defense

Possess new tools to think critically about current developments related to Israel and Gaza.

Lesson 7: Ongoing Tensions

Note to the Educator:

Today's lesson offers an excellent opportunity to merge the focus on history with the focus on current events. In preparation for today's session, ask the student assigned to bring a current events topic to choose something that relates to Israel and Gaza. After their presentation and the ensuing discussion, urge everyone to look back in history to see how past events helped lead to the reality that we are watching unfold in real time.

Begin the session with the student-led current events update.

Open with a broad question:

- What do we know about Israel and Gaza?
 - Presumably, some of the responses will be influenced by the just-concluded current events discussion, as well as by what students know or remember about October 7 and the aftermath of those attacks.
 - Remind students that Israel withdrew unilaterally from Gaza in 2005 with a stated goal of giving the Palestinians an opportunity to show what they would do with no further Israeli rule. And add that a counter-narrative holds that by withdrawing unilaterally but continuing to control (with Egypt) all entries into Gaza, as well as electricity and other resources, Israel never gave the Palestinians a real chance to engage in building an independent society.

Use this [CNN Fact Sheet](#) to introduce Gilad Shalit, who was taken hostage by Hamas in 2006, noting that the hostages held in Gaza after October 7 were not the first Israelis to be held in the territory.

Introduce the notion of Pidyon Shvu'im, ransoming of captives, and [this article](#) from My Jewish Learning. Give students 10 minutes to read the article and then another 10 minutes to discuss it in pairs. What did they learn about the importance of ransoming captives? Why would anyone

oppose doing everything possible to gain someone's freedom? What would they tell the family of an Israeli hostage such as Gilad Shalit?

After the discussion and a quick shareback to the full class, circle back to the CNN timeline, which reveals that Shalit was freed in return for the release of more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners, including many who had murdered Israelis. Show this [short video](#) from France 24 English, noting that it was produced recently so it provides more context than anyone could have anticipated when Shalit was freed in 2011.

Jewish law has clear opinions on the importance of redeeming captives. Distribute [this worksheet](#) (or project it on a screen so everyone can work on it together) for an exploration of Maimonides' teachings. Pose the questions on the worksheet or this question:

- Question: Knowing what we know now, including the role played on October 7 by prisoners who were released in the Shalit exchange, can you make a strong case for - and against - the exchange? Consider moral *and* strategic issues.

Remind everyone that we've been talking about tensions between Israel and Gaza since 7th grade, and that the widespread (pre-October 7) sense of most Israelis was that the IDF needed to go into Gaza every few years to contain the threat from the Hamas-led territory. Remember: In 2007, Hamas seized full control of Gaza from the Palestinian Authority (which continues to run parts of the West Bank) and that in 2014, Israel launched a broad military operation it called Operation Protective Edge, following on multiple incursions that had been launched since Israel ceded the territory in 2005. As you introduce this [2-minute video](#) from The New York Times, ask students to think about how what they see impacts their thinking about the October 7 attacks and the latest news that we discussed at the start of class today.

Engage the class in a brief discussion about the video and their takeaways. Note that the New York Times is a leading US news organization that,

broadly speaking, caters to American readers. As such, the news organization often reflects particular American perspectives on many issues. Add that all news organizations have perspectives and biases, and if we had chosen a different source for a video, different biases might have been present. Remind students that our media skills enable us to discern bias and perspective, and to learn from reports from all sources.

- How do you feel about the idea of “cutting the grass”, or periodically engaging in battle to keep Hamas from getting too strong?
- Does this strategy seem effective?
- What alternatives do you see to manage or resolve tensions between Israel and Gaza?
- How might this report have been different if it had been in an Israeli publication? A Palestinian publication?

Note to Educator: At the end of class, select a volunteer (or assign one!) to present next week’s current events update. Remind the class that it’s important to bring multiple perspectives from multiple mainstream and/or social media outlets. If you want the topic to relate to the class lesson, add specific instructions.

Learning Outcomes:

At the conclusion of the lesson, students will:

1. Deepen their understanding of the complexities surrounding Israel’s relations with Gaza
2. Appreciate the context that history offers for interpreting current events
3. Know the story of Gilad Shalit
4. Grapple with multiple perspectives on redeeming captives/pidyon shvu’im

Lesson 8: The Abraham Accords (2020) - A New Middle East?

Note to the Educator:

This session intentionally uses an excerpt from Israel's Declaration of Independence as a jumping-off point for our study. Stress that the Declaration can be a meaningful lens for considering the founders' goals for the state, and to assess how those goals are being achieved today.

Begin the session with a student-led current events update.

Next, remind the class of the recent lesson when we considered high and low points in Israel's history. Even though last time we focused on the continual tensions with Gaza - and even though we know that those tensions got much worse just a few years ago - news cycles also feature highs alongside the lows, and today we're going to focus on one of those.

Introduce Israel's Declaration of Independence and play [this](#) 2.5 minute video. The short document, read aloud by Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, on May 14, 1948, as he announced the establishment of the state, outlines the ideals the new state pledged to strive to achieve.

Near the end, this passage appears:

We extend our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness, and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land. The State of Israel is prepared to do its share in a common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East.

- Question: What do you understand from this passage?
 - Facilitate a brief discussion about the importance of good relations with neighbors, and of feeling a sense of belonging wherever we live.

- Remind the class that when Israel declared independence, its neighbors united to try to eliminate the new state, and that only 30 years later did one neighbor - Egypt - sign a peace treaty and establish diplomatic ties.
- Fast-forward to August 2020, and set the scene for the class:
 - Barely a quarter-century after it seemed like Israel was on the cusp of a lasting peace with the Palestinians, most Israelis had stopped believing any change in the status quo could be achieved.
 - Israel's government is talking openly about annexing the West Bank (Judea and Samaria), thereby dashing hopes of any future two-state solution with the Palestinians.
 - Israel conquered the territory in the 1967 Six Day War and, while it still maintained control there, it had never moved to formally annex the land.
 - The US feared how the Arab world would react to annexation, and sought to derail the plan.
- US President Donald Trump shifted the focus irreversibly by announcing a surprise diplomatic breakthrough: Israel would establish full diplomatic ties with two Arab countries: The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. While the two countries are hundreds of miles away from Israel and had never been in a formal state of war with the Jewish state, they had never considered establishing diplomatic ties.

At the suggestion of a US advisor, the US-led initiative was named the Abraham Accords in recognition of the three Abrahamic faiths - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - that revere the history of the region. The accords represent a major step toward fulfilling that vision embodied in the Declaration of Independence - a vision of Israel truly integrating into the Middle East.

By normalizing ties and establishing full diplomatic, cultural, and economic relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and (later) Morocco, the Accords enhanced the Jewish state's sense of belonging in

the region. Now, years later, hundreds of thousands of Israelis have traveled to the Gulf States and Morocco as tourists, Jewish life is thriving there, and we're hearing frequent reports of joint ventures between companies in Israel and its new partners. While hopes that more countries will join the Accords are yet to be fulfilled, there is a sense that Israel is marching toward regional integration—and the excitement at this feeling of belonging is palpable when you speak with Israelis.

This [short video](#) challenges us to think about the significance of truly belonging—on a national level as well as a personal level—and can spark conversations about our hopes for peace and collaboration.

Before you screen the video, ask students to consider:

- How would you describe the feeling of belonging—to your family, friends, or in another setting?
- Do you feel a sense of belonging when you think about Israel?
- How do you relate to Israel's quest to "belong" in the Middle East? Do you think Israel ever will truly "belong" in the region?
- How can you help others feel that they belong?

Winners and Losers

Ask students to describe how the Abraham Accords make them feel. After a brief discussion, introduce this JTA article, [5 winners and 4 losers from the historic treaty between Israel and the UAE](#). Take 10 minutes to let everyone read it, and then facilitate a discussion about the winners and the losers.

Questions to consider:

- Why do you think Israel was deemed a winner?
- Why do you think the United Arab Emirates was deemed a winner?
- Why do you think the Palestinians were deemed losers?

If nobody mentions it, you might want to note that the Abraham Accords have continued to thrive, and that Israel and its Gulf State allies have

deepened security cooperation in the face of perceived common threats - primarily from Iran.

End by telling the class that in our next meeting, we will be talking about the October 7 atrocities and the Gaza War that followed. Students may have personal connections or sensitivities, or they may want to share personal stories. If there is anything you want me to know, please talk to me after class today.

Note to Educator: At the end of class, select a volunteer (or assign one!) to present next week's current events update. Remind the class that it's important to bring multiple perspectives from multiple mainstream and/or social media outlets. If you want the topic to relate to the class lesson, add specific instructions.

Learning Outcomes:

At the conclusion of the lesson, students will:

1. Appreciate the deep desire of Israel to be accepted into the Middle East
2. Understand that not all parties viewed the Abraham Accords as a "win"
3. Deepen their appreciation for the importance of understanding history as they navigate today's world

Lesson 9: October 7 and Aftermath (2023-2026)

Note to the Educator:

Lior Zaltsman wrote a [column in Kveller](#) that highlights a range of stories of October 7. Reading it can help prepare you for this lesson, in which students will have a chance to engage with individual stories.

Right after the student-led current events discussion, acknowledge that today's lesson is all about events that have taken place during the students' lives. Some may have personal connections or strong feelings. Reassure the class that this is a safe space for exploration and sharing, and if they need to excuse themselves for a bit of calm, they can do so.

Begin the session with a student-led current events discussion, and then acknowledge that studying ancient history can feel easier than learning about things that happened in our own lifetimes or things that still are unfolding. Today, we're going to talk about events that we all already know something about: the attacks on Israel on October 7, 2023, and the war between Israel and Gaza that followed for the next two years.

- Did you know that former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon liked to say that Israel has never stopped fighting the War of Independence? For many Israelis, the October 7 attacks and the war that followed feel very much like a continuation of Israel's battle to survive, or its War of Independence.

Ask students to share what they remember, or what they know, about October 7. After a few students share, provide an overview of the timeline of events by referring to the [ADL resource](#). Use the materials included in the sections through the October 2025 ceasefire.

Pose questions to encourage students to share their feelings and perspectives. Suggested prompts include:

- When you first heard about the Hamas attack in Israel, do you remember what you thought or felt?

- Does anyone in our group have personal connections to anyone who was impacted directly on October 7 or in the aftermath?
 - Have any of us been to Israel since October 7? What can you share about the country and the mood?
- What must it be like to live through an attack like what Israel experienced on October 7?
- In what ways do these events resonate for you?

Next, divide the class into groups of 2-3 students and give each group copies of a printout of the story of one victim of the October 7 attacks. After they read the stories, encourage students to talk about what they read, and then reconvene as a full class. Students can then share highlights of what they read and the discussions they had about the stories.

Kveller has published multiple powerful stories that can be used for this activity. Consider these (feel free to substitute other stories if you have them, or if any families share that they have a personal connection.):

- [This Holocaust Scholar Gave History Lessons While in Captivity in Gaza](#)
- [Remembering Jewish Peace Activist Vivian Silver](#)
- [Son of October 7 Victims Returns to Kibbutz Be'eri to Light Menorah Found in Rubble](#)
- [Each of the 6 Murdered Hostages Recovered in Rafah Was an Entire Universe](#)

(The links include videos that can be viewed if students read the articles on tablets or computers.)

Conclude this session by offering students a chance to share thoughts or reflections.

Note to Educator: At the end of class, select a volunteer (or assign one!) to present next week's current events update. Remind the class that it's

important to bring multiple perspectives from multiple mainstream and/or social media outlets. If you want the topic to relate to the class lesson, add specific instructions.

Learning Outcomes:

At the conclusion of the lesson, students will:

1. Understand the sequence of events unleashed on October 7, 2023
2. Recognize the human toll of the massacre

Lesson 10: Israel in My World

Note to the Educator:

Today's session is all about creating personal meaning, or helping students find their own place in the story of Israel. The first two activities provide space for students to explore and express their connections to Israel and the role that Israel plays in their lives. The final activity is designed to create an opportunity for students to share some of the ways their identities incorporate Israel in the larger communal settings where they engage. It might be a good idea to invite a member of the clergy to join today's session, or to facilitate the discussion in the last activity.

- While students are writing on the Post-Its, play calm Israeli music to set the scene.

Begin the session with a student-led current events update.

On arrival to the classroom, students are greeted by a graffiti wall that is blank except for the following questions and prompts, all spaced across the wall (Note: You can use a giant expanse of butcher paper or individual giant post-it notes to create the graffiti wall):

- When I think of Israel, this is what comes to mind...
- I've been to Israel (check one)
 - 0 times
 - 1 time
 - 2 times
 - 3 or more times
- Next time I go to Israel, here's what I want to do...
- I love Israel because...
- Israel makes me uncomfortable because...
- Here's a funny story I heard about Israel
- Something about Israel I wish I understood better...

Distribute markers and post-it notes and give students 10 minutes to post as many things as they wish on the wall. They can write directly on the wall

or on post-it notes that they affix to the right place.

Ask students if they want to share anything from the responses they posted on the wall, or if they want to discuss any of the entries posted by others.

Next, invite everyone to participate in a “gallery walk” in which The iCenter Israel Resource Cards are on display. (You can arrange them on the floor, on tables, or on a wall, but they should be out of sight during the first part of the meeting.) Encourage everyone to browse the cards for a few minutes.

- Ask each student to choose one card that shows something they love, or like, about Israel.
- Once everyone has made a choice and is holding a card, go around the room so that each student can share why they chose their card. Make sure all cards are returned to the large pile before starting the next question.
- Next, ask each student to choose one card that shows something that frustrates or disappoints them about Israel. Once everyone has chosen a card, provide an opportunity for everyone to share the card they selected. If this might be stressful for some, you can ask people to share in pairs (with or without a full-group shareback.)
- Finally, ask each student to choose a card that represents something they want to learn more about. Once everyone has made a choice and is holding a card, go around the room so that each student can share why they chose their card.

After the cards have been collected, gather the group for one more discussion. Inquire about how (or if) Israel and their connection to Israel are felt in their public schools. Does Israel come up in conversations related to current events, to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to the recent war with Iran, to domestic politics, or in other ways? Do they ever feel uncomfortable? Do they feel confident in their identities and in their place at school and in the community?

If a member of the clergy is facilitating this discussion, they can ask how

the synagogue can be supportive, what they can do to help.

ASSIGNMENT: While we don't generally give homework assignments, it's important for students to understand their ties to Israel in a broader context. Between now and our next meeting, ask students to interview a parent, grandparent, or other older relative about the place of Israel in their lives. Questions to ask include:

- What is the earliest milestone of Israel's history that you remember?
 - Tell me what you remember.
- If you have been to Israel, what do you remember from your first visit?
- If you have not been to Israel, why haven't you visited?
- How does it make you feel to know there is a country where the majority of people are Jewish?
- Is there something you wish was different about Israel?
- What would you like to do on your next visit to Israel?
- What do you want me to know about your connection - or our family's connection - to Israel?

Be prepared to share highlights of your conversation at our next meeting.

Note to Educator: At the end of class, select a volunteer (or assign one!) to present next week's current events update. Remind the class that it's important to bring multiple perspectives from multiple mainstream and/or social media outlets. If you want the topic to relate to the class lesson, add specific instructions.

Learning Outcomes:

At the conclusion of the lesson, students will:

1. Clarify the place of Israel in their own lives
2. Define new personal learning objectives
3. Appreciate that different people connect to Israel in different ways

Lesson 11: Israel in the World

Note to the Educator:

This final session brings much of our study full-circle. By sharing what they learned from talking to older relatives or friends, students are expressing meaningful connections to Israel that can encourage them to think about their own connections.

In the Multiple Timelines activity, we're exploring multiple ideas: On its own, the first (black) timeline provides a solid recap of key moments in Israel's history. The second (blue) timeline serves as a reminder that there's more to Israel than politics, wars, and diplomacy. The third (brown) timeline acknowledges the importance of considering how events look for other points of view, in this instance a Palestinian perspective. Remind students that all of these timelines provide broad-strokes narratives. Just like there is no single "American" point of view, there are many Israeli and Palestinian perspectives that can't be fully represented in the timelines.

After the student-led current events discussion, ask students to share what they learned from the interviews they conducted with family members. Allow 10-15 minutes for people to share interesting things they heard from parents, grandparents, or other loved ones. This is a good opportunity to stress the different perspectives that people of different ages and life experiences bring to their observations.

Turning to the final activity in our Israel Education study this year, ask students to share highlights from Israel's history that stand out to them. After a few people offer milestones, remind them that Israel - like all countries - is about more than war, security, and diplomacy. And, while Israel is certainly close to our hearts, it matters to many people - not all of whom see it the same way we might.

With all this in mind, we're going to do a "lightning round" of Israel's history. Much of it will be a review of things we've been exploring this year and last year. But there's going to be a lot of new information too. And new perspectives. Assure the class that it's okay to disagree with some of the perspectives being presented, but stress that it's important they understand these narratives are very important to a lot of people who they're likely to encounter.

As we begin to view the [slides](#), encourage people to ask questions, and ask them to take notes of things that

- surprise you
- please you
- bother you
- or make you want to learn more.
- **black is Zionist timeline, blue is a cultural timeline, brown is a Palestinian timeline
 - Let's look at Israeli history, but remember, Israel has more than just complications and is full of culture. Let's remember that we can miss history if we just look at one side

Time permitting, engage in questions as they arise. Leave 15 minutes for a wrap-up discussion at the very end. After going through all three timelines, distribute this timeline, printed in color and single sided, to every student. Encourage them to label the timeline: A smiley face might indicate that they like or are interested in something. A question mark might indicate they want to learn more. A frown might indicate they are uncomfortable with something.

Questions that might spark conversation include:

- What's something you learned?
- How did it feel to see the same events from two very different perspectives?
- Why do you think we focused on Israeli culture in the middle of all the politics?

Ask each student to share one thing from this presentation that either surprised, pleased, or bothered them. And, finally, ask each student to share one thing they want to learn more about.

Learning Outcomes:

At the conclusion of the lesson, students will:

1. Appreciate how different ages and life experiences impact people's perspectives on Israel (and other topics)
2. Expand their holistic view of Israel's history
3. Begin to understand the importance of welcoming a wide range of perspectives and opinions

VIDEOS:

Lesson 3

- 1) Video name: Egypt & Israel: a Lasting Peace? | History of Israel Explained | Unpacked
- 2) Video name: The Life and Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin | History of Israel Explained | Unpacked
- 3) Extra credit video name: Sadat Knesset Speech (With English Subtitles) by Tamir ElSahy
- 4) Extra credit video name: Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's State Funeral Service by clintonlibrary42

Lesson 4:

- 1) Middle East Peace Summit on C-Span website
- 2) The Second Intifada: When Hope for Peace Died by Unpacked

Lesson 5:

- 1) Israeli Disengagement from Gaza on C-Span website
- 2) NPR reports
 - a) As Gaza Settlers Leave, Palestinians Cheer, Plan
 - b) < Caught in the Middle in Gaza
 - c) < Emotions Mixed as Troops Force Gaza Evacuations
 - d) < Palestinians Heartened by a Withdrawal
 - e) < Leaving Gaza: One Family's Story
- 3) Former Gush Katif Resident Remembers 2005 Disengagement From Gaza by i24NEWS English
- 4) Israel's Disengagement from Gaza | History of Israel Explained | Unpacked

Lesson 6:

- 1) Video title: Sderot Indoor Recreation Center by Jewish National Fund-USA

Lesson 7:

- 1) Israel - Hamas deal: Gilad Shalit, a particular former hostage case in Israel • FRANCE 24 English from FRANCE 24 English
- 2) Israel-Gaza Conflict 2014: 'Cutting the Grass' of Hamas's Militancy | The New York Times

Lesson 8:

- 1) Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel (English subtitles) by ShlichimMetrowest
- 2) Shalom / Salaam / Shalem: New Beginnings, Ancient Values by iCenter