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Teaching About Palestine & Israel Through the Lens of Human Rights

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With urgent calls to address racial and ethnic disparities across the globe, brought about most recently by the Black Lives Matter movement, schools have rightly been seeking to 'decolonize the curriculum', becoming mindful of the importance of teaching about historic power and privilege across the globe. The teaching community is on a learning journey to better understand the tremendous impact inequality has on people's lives, as they navigate systemic discrimination and the unequal and unjust distribution of wealth, recognition and resources.



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The on-going crisis in Palestine and Israel remains firmly implanted in our imaginations, and with pupils acutely aware of it through social media, opinions at home and conversations with friends, many teachers are wondering how, and whether, to teach about this global issue. Some teachers have argued that school should be a place free of politics -- we argue that the decision not to teach about global injustice is a political stance itself. The ability to discuss Human Rights in school is an essential cornerstone to nurturing well-rounded citizens who step out into the world with an understanding of, and commitment to, social justice.

With regards to this conflict, Indian writer and activist Arundhati Roy said,

"The trouble is that once you see it, you can't unsee it. And once you've seen it, keeping quiet, saying nothing, becomes as political an act as speaking out."

This resource supports teachers to hold critical conversations about this ongoing crisis by sharing new and existing activities and resources, basing the teaching around



human rights and evidence, and using a global citizenship education approach. It is rooted in an anti-racist approach and recognises that the process of learning can be uncomfortable, and that it will inevitably include unlearning. We encourage teachers not to be dissuaded because they don't know everything about this crisis -- when a topic is divisive we strongly advise keeping the conversation rooted in values of justice, fairness and rights. Seek information from widely-recognised organisations that have a track record for upholding these values and have a track record of standing up for them, and keep an open and critical mind and heart. In writing this resource we were encouraged by Maya Angelou's words,

“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”

We acknowledge that we are on our own learning journey about this crisis even though some of us have lived experience of it. We are therefore intentional in keeping this resource 'live' and responsive to new knowledge that is firmly grounded in dignity and equity for all people. If you would like to add anything to this resource, or question anything in it, please get in touch with us at hello@globallearninglondon.org.



"Banksy: Armoured Peace Dove" by eddiedangerous is licensed under CC BY 2.0



Preparation - How to Hold Classroom Conversations around Controversial Issues

Before you begin, establish ground rules with the class by inviting them to suggest what the class needs in order to hold critical conversations openly and respectfully, especially where students hold starkly opposing views.

- ▲ Focus on the idea not the person
- ▲ Encourage rights respecting language and behaviour
- ▲ Agree on how to disagree
- ▲ Ensure you leave enough time to close the conversation by giving pupils an opportunity to voice their 'last thoughts' as recommended by a Philosophy for Children approach
- ▲ You might also dedicate time at the end to reflect on what worked well in holding the space, whereby pupils could highlight what they appreciated and/or learned from others.
- ▲ Do not expect that the conversation will be wrapped up neatly, but encourage pupils to wrap it up respectfully.



OXFAM

[Oxfam Education has produced the following resource on why and how to teach about controversial issues.](#)

We also recommend this little-known outstanding resource: [Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry](#).

Emotions may run high -- for some pupils, this crisis is personal. We recommend sharing with the pupils some tips from [this article](#) by Greater Good at the University of Berkley.

Introduction - Who is Who?



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The conflict in Israel and Palestine is often framed as a conflict between Muslims and Jews. But the reality is much more complicated than that.

- ▲ As a warm up, play [‘Who’s Who?’ on page 13 of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel’s ‘Eye Witness’ resource.](#)
- ▲ When you have finished, ask the pupils if anything they found out surprised them. For example:
 - Did the pupils know that a significant portion of the Palestinian population consists of Christians?
 - How does this change a conversation that is often framed as a Muslim-Jewish conflict?

Just as there are Palestinian Christians, there are other overlapping (or intersectional) identities in this crisis. Ask the pupils to consider which of them can be paired and which of them cannot. You can turn this into an activity by giving them the identity cards and asking which of those intersect. For example, did you know that there are Jewish Arabs, Black Ethiopian Israelis and Christian Zionists?

Contrary to how the crisis is often represented, this is not a polarised conflict between two homogenous groups. There are different opinions, affiliations, loyalties and intersectional identities emerging out of a long and complicated history. Re-iterate that any resolution to conflict has to be grounded in justice, fairness and equity, with key values centering on human dignity and non-discrimination.

1. Activity: Fair or Unfair

In groups, ask pupils to sort out the statements below into three categories: Fair, Unfair and Don't Know. Discuss notions of fairness and what considerations and discussions took place in sorting the statements.


- ▲ Being punished for saying that the rules of your school are unfair
- ▲ Racing against someone who has had more training than you, who has a coach when you do not, and who has access to training grounds when you do not.
- ▲ Giving two pupils of the same age, whose parents earn similar incomes and who live in similar households and in similar neighbourhoods, very different amounts in pocket money: e.g. £10 a week for one, and £1 a week for the other
- ▲ Making someone give you their food or homework because you are stronger than them
- ▲ Pushing someone back after they have hit you.



For younger pupils, you may also wish to add to these statements by using those from [Lesson 1 of Amnesty International's 'Right Here, Right Now' module](#).

Now give out the following statements and ask pupils to sort them out into the same three categories of: Fair, Unfair, Don't Know.

- ▲ Any person from a religious group from anywhere in the world can claim citizenship upon arrival to a country. By contrast, people from a different religious group, who chose, or were forced, to leave that same country, are not allowed back.
- ▲ A powerful country repeatedly issues statements in support of one state's bombardment of another, saying it has a "legitimate right to defend itself". It makes no such statement when the other side strike back.
- ▲ A global power gives one of the world's richest countries billions in aid annually. In comparison, it gives a significantly poorer neighbouring country \$200 million in aid.

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- ▲ A democratic country's laws consider conscientious objectors (people who refuse to serve in a country's mandatory military service) as criminals.
 - ▲ Two countries at war have starkly different military technology and power. One counts its military manpower at 3,600,000, has one of the world's most advanced and well-financed armies in the world with a defence budget of \$20 billion and 80 nuclear warheads as well as the ability to intercept 90% of rocket attacks. The other has ground forces of 62,200 people with 50 armoured vehicles, and no army, navy, tanks or missiles. Is this an equal conflict?

For more activities like this around global themes of justice and sustainability, go to RISC's [How Do We Know It's Working? toolkit](#).

2. Is Colonialism History?



"Two boys, two concrete blocks" by Michael Loadenthal is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Activity

- ▲ In a school hall, playground or in a classroom with the tables and chairs cleared, ask the pupils to walk around the space freely, going in any direction they wish, slowing down and speeding up.
- ▲ Now restrict the area they can walk in, and add in instructions such as 'Stop/Go'.
- ▲ Restrict the area further and further so the space they can move in is increasingly restricted. You may wish to add further instructions such as 'jump' and 'clap' and 'touch your toes'.
- ▲ Ask the pupils how it felt to try and move around in an increasingly limited space while trying to follow instructions. Then introduce the notion of 'colonialism'. Ask them for a definition.


Colonialism can simply be defined as the control of one country over another. It is not a passive occupation – colonialism is active control over, and profit from, the people and natural resources of that country. When one country colonises another, it enforces a government that the colonized country did not vote for, issues laws that the colonized country did not agree to, and generally makes decisions that the colonized country has no say in.

The great Black American thinker [bell hooks](#) (born September 25, 1952) argues that colonialism is not dead. Look at the maps and accompanying facts below. Based on the definition above, would you say that Israel is colonizing Palestine or occupying it?



[Teachers can also share this interactive tool from Visualising Palestine](#)

When the UN passed its partition plan in November 1947, it allocated to the founding Israeli State roughly 7% of the territory of what was then-known as the territory of Mandatory Palestine. By the early 50s, almost 95% of this land was confiscated by the Israel State through the enactment of new laws. The Nakba ('catastrophe' in Arabic) took place in 1948. You can find out more about the Nakba from the ['Facing the Nakba'](#) curriculum by Jewish Voices for Peace



Holocaust survivor and Hungarian-Canadian physician Gabor Mate also speaks about the Nakba briefly in this impassioned podcast: [Israel / Palestine - This Needs To Be Heard](#)

The BAFTA award winning short film 'The Present' by British-Palestinian filmmaker Farah Nabulsi follows a father and his daughter, as a simple shopping trip for a present takes a dark turn into indignity through checkpoints and segregation. The film was also nominated for an Academy Award and an Oscar, and at the time of writing this resource remains freely available on Netflix.

The United Nations, a widely-respected international body set up to implement peace and justice between nations, has declared Israel's occupation of Palestine as unlawful – that is, it is against international law. Nelson Mandela famously said,

**“We know too well that our freedom is incomplete
without the freedom of the Palestinians”**

Discuss

What do you think Nelson Mandela meant by this saying? How is the freedom of a people related to the freedom of all people? Why is an injury to one of us also an injury to all of us?

3. Making Profit out of Dispossession

Ask pupils if they can think of examples of boycotting. They may mention the Bristol Bus Boycott, the boycott of goods in Apartheid South Africa or boycotts against corporations like Nestle, The Body Shop and Caterpillar.

For each example given ask pupils why people chose to boycott those goods, what they hoped to achieve by boycotting, and how that might be an example of yielding 'consumer power'.

The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement works to pressure Israel to comply with international law. According to the UN, there are more than 253 illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian land -- that is, houses that have been built on what was declared by the UN as Palestinian territory. In order to create housing exclusively for Israeli settlers, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been forced out of their homes and off their lands.

To understand more about these settlements, watch these videos by Emmy award winning news outlet Vox:

- [Israeli settlements, explained](#)
- [Why Israeli settlements don't feel like a conflict zone?](#)
- [Settlers are taking over East Jerusalem one house at a time](#)

Goods and products are made in these settlements which are then sold in the global market, resulting in a multi-million industry from which the state of Israel profits by denying Palestinian access to land and natural resources mandated to them.



[See Amnesty International's Information Sheet: Ban Israeli Settlement Goods](#)

See also [Fairtrade Foundation's blog](#) on supporting Palestinian farmers.

4. Activity: Human Rights

Start by cutting up copies of the table below, which lists Human Rights violations committed in the ongoing crisis and condemned by the United Nations or Amnesty International. In groups, ask the pupils to sort them into those committed by Israel and those committed by Palestinian groups. They can also have separate piles for ones they don't know or cannot decide on, as well as those committed by both sides. Four squares are intentionally left empty for any violations pupils are aware of which are not listed. Always ask for evidence and sources.

Confiscation of land and resources	Labelling Palestinian and Israeli human rights defenders as terrorists	Imprisonment of children	Targeting of women activists and journalists	Failure to call for elections
Poisoning by exposure to toxic wastes	Forced eviction and displacement	Subjecting the other population to extreme Poverty	Home demolitions	Denial of LGBTQ+ rights
A two-tier system of rights based on ethnicity and nationality	Excessive use of force and torture	Subjecting the other population to food insecurity	Suicide bombing	
Brutal crackdowns on peaceful protestors	Storing arms in residential buildings	Using civilians as human shields	Restriction or blockage of access to water	

Answers:

Human rights violations committed by the Israeli state: A two-tier system of rights based on ethnicity and nationality, Confiscation of natural resources, Food insecurity, excessive use of force and torture, Subjecting the other population to extreme Poverty, Poisoning by exposure to toxic wastes, Home demolitions, Forced eviction and displacement, Targeting of women activists and journalists, Imprisonment of children, Labelling Palestinian and Israeli human rights defenders as terrorists, Land confiscation, Brutal crackdowns on peaceful protestors, Restriction or blockage of access to water [reference: United Nations Higher Commissioner on Human Rights]

Human rights violations committed by Palestinian governments: Brutal crackdowns on peaceful protestors, Storing arms in residential buildings, Targeting of women activists and journalists, Using civilians as human shields, Detention of human rights activists, Suicide bombing, Failure to call for elections, Denial of LGBTQI+ rights [references: Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch]

As an extension or alternative to this activity, we also highly recommend [EEAPI's How \[non\]violent is that? on p.11 of their Eyewitness in the Classroom resource.](#)



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5. Activity: Anti-Semitic or Islamophobic?

Read out the following statements to the class. Ask pupils to put a thumb up if they agree and a thumb down if they disagree. If they are not sure, they can hold their hand out flat. You may wish to ask the pupils to stand in a circle facing out so that they are giving an honest response unhindered by what others will think of them and uninfluenced by one another's votes.



- ▲ It is Anti-Semitic to hold the Israeli government to account for its human rights violations
- ▲ We should all be directly accountable for our government's actions when it commits unjust acts of violence
- ▲ It is Islamophobic to criticise Iran for its human rights violations.
- ▲ People should not resist when they are being persecuted or attacked.
- ▲ If both sides are committing acts of violence, neither side has the right to call the other side 'terrorists'
- ▲ You don't have to be anti-Semitic to be supportive of the Palestinian right to self-determination
- ▲ You don't have to be Islamophobic to be supportive of Israel's right to exist
- ▲ We must remain neutral even when a conflict is unequal
- ▲ The truth is always in the middle

Discuss

Which statements did they find most difficult to reach a decision on? Which statements did they feel most strongly about? Did they find that they changed their minds about any of the statements as they listened to the others?



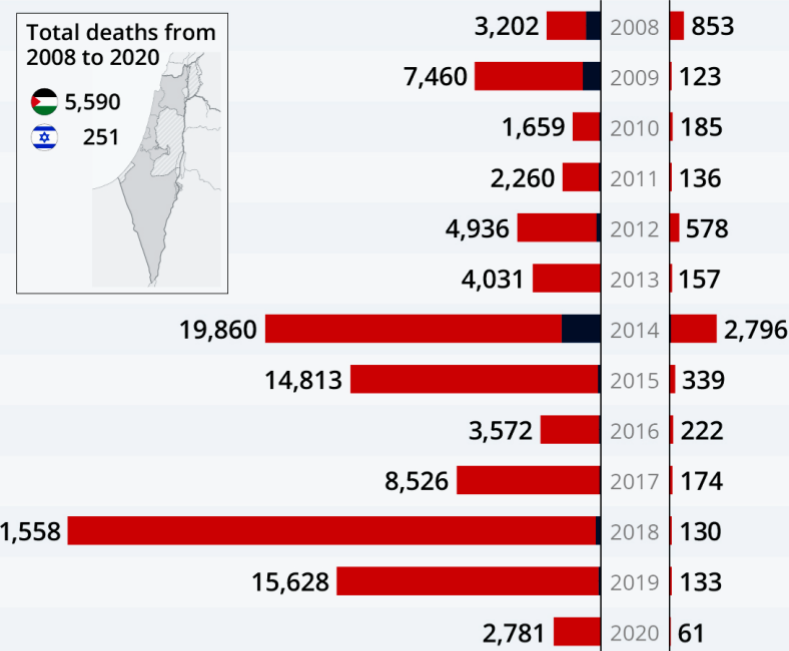
6. Activity: Impartiality When the Truth is Not in the Middle

The Human Cost Of The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Israeli & Palestinian deaths/injuries documented by the UN

■ Deaths ■ Injuries

Palestinian Israeli



Source: United Nations



statista

Israeli & Palestinian deaths/injuries documented by the UN by STATISTA.

Image: Forbes

Look at the statistics in the diagram.

These are the overall figures of deaths and injuries not taking into consideration the size of the two populations.

According to Statista, as of 2020, the population size of Israel was 8.1 million and the population of Palestine was 5.1 million.

Activity

To work out the deaths and injuries per capita, use the formula $\text{Measurement} / \text{Population} = \text{Measurement per capita}$.


- How do the per capita figures differ from the figures in the UN's chart above? You may want to create your own chart that takes per capita into consideration.
- What do these figures tell you about the relative power dynamics? Is this a conflict of two equal powers?
- Consider this: should we always back the disenfranchised and the 'underdog'?

7. What Actions Can Pupils and Teachers Take?



Pixabay photo by geralt

- ▲ Exercise your consumer power. Check where the goods you buy come from and whether they have been produced or manufactured in illegal settlements. Find out more [here](#).
- ▲ Join the Campaign Against Arms Trade ([CAAT](#)) in urging the UK government to stop arms sales to the Israeli government. You can do this by writing to your local MP, or writing to CAAT in support of their work. CAAT is a UK-based organisation working to end the international arms trade and was nominated for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize.
- ▲ Add your voice to the international community of peaceful protests demanding an end to military occupation, destruction of homes and displacement of families.
- ▲ Support the effort to rebuild demolished homes with the [Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions](#), a non-violent, direct-action group originally established to oppose and resist the Israeli government's demolition of Palestinian houses in the Occupied Territory. ICAHD work towards One Democratic State in Palestine/Israel as the only practical way to a just and sustainable peace for all the people of Palestine/Israel.

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- ▲ Start a linking project with schools in Palestine and Israel. Find out what you can learn from them about peace-building, share ideas about what justice looks like when it is centered on human dignity, and ask them what they think the most impactful action you can take is. Get tools and tips on linking here: <https://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/>
 - ▲ Speak out against discrimination and stereotyping. Be nuanced in conversations by making clear distinctions between Jewishness and Israeli state oppression. Help to raise the voices of the many Jewish groups working towards peace. Amplify the message that upholding the liberation of Palestinians and their right to self-determination is an urgent call for rights and justice.
 - ▲ Educate yourself. Seek out the insights of international human rights activists whose work you respect, as well as international organisations with a track record of working for human dignity and equity across the world. Favour the contributions of those who have lived experience of the crisis.

For more ideas, check out Lesson 12 from Amnesty International's [“Right Here, Right Now”](#)

What other ideas do you have? Maybe your school has taken an action that you are proud to share. Please write to us at hello@globallearninglondon.org as we grow this list collectively.

Resources for the Classroom

- ▲ Amnesty International's lesson plan on [‘The Kites Are Flying’ by Michael Morpurgo](#)
- ▲ EAPPI's [‘Eye Witness in the Classroom: Human Rights in Palestine and Israel today’](#)
- ▲ CAABU's [range of activities around the main issues of the Israel Palestine Conflict](#).
- ▲ Performing International Plays' [lesson plan around Dalia Taha's play ‘Fireworks’](#)
- ▲ British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) Representative Assembly's [The Israel Palestine Conflict: Searching for a Just Peace](#)





Books to Check Out from your Library:

Tower Hamlets Schools Library Services



Compiled by [Tower Hamlets Schools Library Services](#)

- ▲ Little piece of ground by Elizabeth Laird
- ▲ The kites are flying by Michael Morpurgo
- ▲ The Wall by William Sutcliffe
- ▲ Living under occupation: young Palestinians speak out by Anthony Robinson and Annemarie Young
- ▲ Palestine by Joe Sacco

Adult-Level Resources for Self-Led Exploration:

- ▲ [Holocaust survivor and trauma specialist Gabor Mate speaks about Palestine and Israel](#)
- ▲ [Statement from women of colour and Jewish Feminists](#)
- ▲ [Occupied Palestinian territories](#)
- ▲ [A Threshold Crossed](#)
- ▲ [United Nations: The question of Palestine](#)

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Thank you to Faaria Ahmed, Simi Musa and Martin Spafford for their time.



As part of this resource, we have included links and/or content from the following organisations:

- ▲ Amnesty International
- ▲ Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice
- ▲ Council for Arab-British Understanding
- ▲ Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)
- ▲ Forbes
- ▲ Jewish Voices for Peace
- ▲ Oxfam Education
- ▲ Oxford Human Rights Hub
- ▲ Performing International Plays
- ▲ 'This Needs to be Heard' podcast
- ▲ Statista
- ▲ Visualizing Palestine
- ▲ Vox Media

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