

Lesson Plan:

Israel's Declaration of Independence

Overview

This lesson introduces students to Israel's Declaration of Independence. Through an interactive session and discussion, students will gain insight into the delicate situation facing the Jewish people as Israel's independence was about to be declared. This activity gives students the chance to "walk in the footsteps" of leaders, thus developing an understanding of the dilemmas and choices our leaders made that in turn, have shaped the course of history.

Target age group: Grade 9 – 12 (can be adjusted to other grades).

Connection to curriculum: Geography, social studies, world history, Jewish history, Jewish studies.

Time required: Approx. 2 hours.

Materials Required: Declaration of Independence (English translation), 5 sets of Declaration of Independence puzzle (10 index cards, each card featuring a different paragraph from the Declaration), teacher set of the Declaration of Independence puzzle, 5 index cards with one challenge written on each.

Objectives

- Gain insight into the general atmosphere in Israel prior to signing the Declaration of Independence.
- Discuss the content, purpose, and order of each section of the Declaration of Independence.
- Determine the importance and necessity of the Declaration of Independence for the Jewish people in the past, present and future.

Procedure

Opening - Begin by giving students background information of the atmosphere in Israel just before the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Background Information - On May 14, 1948, corresponding to the 5th of Iyar of that year, David Ben Gurion called together the Provisional Council of the emerging State in order to formally declare the State of Israel. This act reflects, without a doubt, the most significant declaration in Jewish history in 2000 years.

For 2,000 years the Jewish people had dreamed of, and waited impatiently for this moment. Now the moment of truth is before us. The opportunity has finally come for us to achieve the dream of generations.

However there are many problems.

The question that stands before the nation now is whether or not to proceed, knowing all the risks. It is clear however, that if we don't act now, we could miss this amazing historical opportunity.

As David Ben Gurion assembles the Provisional Council, these are the issues he must deal with.

Activity 1

"Should we proceed?"

1. Ask students to go back in time to 1947 and put themselves in the footsteps of leaders. Present the following questions for class discussion:
 - What would be the declared character of this State?
 - Would this be a religious State or a secular State?
 - How would we relate to the Arab population living in our midst?
 - How could we appeal to the Arab states around us to stop the war and violence and insure them that we only want peace?
 - What kind of democracy would we establish?
 - What would be our relationship with the Jewish Diaspora?
2. Divide the class into five groups. Remind the groups that there are many questions, risks, difficulties and fears facing the Jewish people, yet the question remains – "should we proceed?"
 - Each group is asked to role play this dilemma.
 - Each group is given a challenge card and asked to read the question and discuss whether or not they feel this is the right time to act. Challenge card questions:
 - ▶ The British mandate will be ending soon.
 - ▶ The Arab populations in the surrounding States have called for war against us.
 - ▶ The U.S. has become frightened that we will not be able to stand up to the challenge.
 - ▶ Truman is urging us not to declare the State for fear of the consequences.
 - ▶ We are a small and not strongly armed nation at this point.
 - In discussion of their challenge card, students should consider the following questions (to be written on the board) - Should we wait for a better time? Should we postpone until we are ready to meet all the challenges? Is it now or never?
3. Each group presents their challenge and conclusions to the class.



THE DECLARATION

OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL -
May 14, 1948

ERETZ-ISRAEL [(Hebrew) - the Land of Israel, Palestine] was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.

After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom.

Impelled by this historic and traditional attachment, Jews strove in every successive generation to re-establish themselves in their ancient homeland. In recent decades they returned in their masses. Pioneers, *ma'pilim* [(Hebrew) - immigrants coming to Eretz-Israel in defiance of restrictive legislation] and defenders, they made deserts bloom, revived the Hebrew language, built villages and towns, and created a thriving community controlling its own economy and culture, loving peace but knowing how to defend itself, bringing the blessings of progress to all the country's inhabitants, and aspiring towards independent nationhood. In the year 5657 (1897), at the summons of the spiritual father of the Jewish State, Theodore Herzl, the First Zionist Congress convened and proclaimed the right of the Jewish people to national rebirth in its own country.

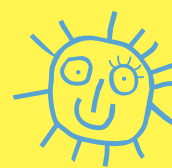
This right was recognized in the Balfour Declaration of the 2nd November, 1917, and re-affirmed in the Mandate of the League of Nations which, in particular, gave international sanction to the historic connection between the Jewish people and Eretz-Israel and to the right of the Jewish people to rebuild its National Home.

The catastrophe which recently befell the Jewish people - the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe - was another clear demonstration of the urgency of solving the problem of its homelessness by re-establishing in Eretz-Israel the Jewish State, which would open the gates of the homeland wide to every Jew and confer upon the Jewish people the status of a fully privileged member of the comity of nations...



Activity 2

Declaration of Independence puzzle



Each group receives a Declaration of Independence puzzle and asked to put the pieces of the puzzle together in an order that makes sense to them.

Students return to the large group and together with the group leader, assemble the Declaration on the board. As each piece is placed in its correct spot, students are asked whether they came up with the same order and why each piece belongs where it does.

Conclusion / Wrap Up

Ask students why they believe the Declaration of Independence was and is important for the Jewish people. Discuss whether all the segments of the Declaration still apply today and whether or not they believe changes should be made. Conclude by asking students what they learned in this lesson and what they will take home with them.

Reading and resources suggested

- Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs - <http://www.mfa.gov.il/>
- Sachar, H. M., 2002 (second ed.). A history of Israel from the Rise of Zionism to Our Time. New York: Alfred A. Knopf
- Alon, A., 1971. The Israelis. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston

For extensions, additional ideas, resources and information please enter our site at www.israelexperts.com or call us at 1-800-772-2452 972-8-867-4343.

IsraelExperts - Initiatives in Education, Ltd.
is an Israel based educational endeavor offering innovative activities with a hands-on approach, specifically tailored for your group: summer-programs, educational travel, professional development, seminars, workshops and more.



IsraelExperts