

MAY 15, 1948 – INDEPENDENCE OR CATASTROPHE

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will examine facts about the 1948 independence of Israel from both Israeli and Palestinian sources.
- Students will analyze and compare author point of view and bias in two written histories.
- Students will reflect on and discuss subjectivity and objectivity in history.

VOCABULARY & CONCEPTS

al Nakba (the Great Catastrophe)	diaspora	Palestinian Authority
creation of modern Israel	Jewish settlements	Palestinian refugees

MEDIUM

Handouts with excerpts from articles on Bitterlemons.org, a Web site that presents Israeli and Palestinian viewpoints on prominent issues of concern



MATERIALS NEEDED

- *Student Worksheet* (pg. 4) with excerpts of articles and questions for analyzing and comparing histories (one per student)
- *Teacher Answer Sheet* (pg. 5) for decoding histories

TIME

20 minutes

LESSON STEPS

1. Decide whether you prefer for this to be an individual or a small-group activity.
2. Present *Introduction to the Lesson* (pg. 2) to the class.
3. Distribute the *Student Worksheet*.
4. After the students have completed the worksheets, lead a discussion of the questions using the *Teacher Answer Sheet*.
5. Lead a discussion about truth and objectivity using *Further Questions* (pg. 3).

INTRODUCTION TO THE LESSON

Understanding the point of view of the author is essential when it comes to evaluating conflicting histories of a single event. To most Israelis, May 14, 1948 was the glorious day in which the modern state of Israel was born. After 2000 years of Jewish Diaspora, the Zionist dream was fulfilled and a Jewish flag again flew over the promised land. For many Palestinians, May 14, 1948 is “al Nakba,” “the catastrophe.” This day marks the beginning of the Palestinian Diaspora that has resulted in an estimated five million Palestinians, a majority of the Palestinian population, living as refugees outside of their homeland.

The documents you will see are brief excerpts from articles found on the Internet having to do with the events of 1948 in Israel/Palestine. The first article was written by Yisrael Harel, the former Chairman of the Council of Jewish Settlements in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza District. The Political Dictionary of Israel defines the purpose of Jewish settlements as “to provide security to civilian settlements...in far-flung areas of Palestine and to establish permanent Zionist ‘facts’ on the ground” (Reich 337). The second article was written by Ghassan Khatib, former Minister of labor in the Palestinian Authority. The Political Encyclopedia of the Middle East defines the Palestinian Authority as the “semi-official, self-governing Palestinian authority...the first government to be formally established inside historic Palestine” (Sela 590).

Which of these accounts is “the real truth?” All history is subjective in that the historian chooses to include certain facts and leave other facts out. He or she chooses certain words in favor of others. Read the article excerpts and consider which facts are stressed in each history and which facts are left out.

- **Decide** whether you prefer for this to be an individual or a small-group activity.
- **Distribute** *Student Worksheet*.
- **Review** the *Teacher Answer Sheet* in preparation for leading the decoding of the documents.
- **Lead** the decoding using the *Teacher Answer Sheet*.
- **Use** *Further Questions* to discuss objectivity and subjectivity in history.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Which of these accounts is true? How do you know? Could both be true?

How could you find out more information to help discover deeper truths than are available in these short accounts?

According to Princeton University's WordNet, the noun "objectivity" means "a judgment based on observable phenomena and uninfluenced by emotions or personal prejudices." The noun "subjectivity" means "taking place within the mind and modified by individual bias."

Would you say these accounts are based in objectivity or subjectivity? Why?

REFERENCES

Harel, Yisrael. "An infuriating comparison." An Israeli View. Bitterlemons.org.
<<http://www.bitterlemons.org/previous/bl251004ed38.html>>

Khatib, Ghassan. "Harvesting from this Rocky Soil." A Palestinian View. Bitterlemons.org.
<<http://www.bitterlemons.org/previous/bl201003ed38.html>>

Princeton University. WordNet. <<http://wordnet.princeton.edu/>>

Reich, Bernard and David Goldberg. The Political Dictionary of Israel. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2000.

Sela, Avraham. The Political Encyclopedia of the Middle East. New York: Continuum, 1999.

NAME

DATE

DIRECTIONS

Read the excerpts below and consider which facts are stressed in each history and which facts are left out. In particular, consider facts regarding how the war began, its effects and how the author explains Israel's position after the war. Then answer the three questions for each passage, providing evidence for your answers.

<p>“The Jewish people's war of independence in 1948-9 was in fact initiated by the Arabs. On May 15, 1948 five Arab standing armies--of Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Iraq and Lebanon--invaded the country that had that day declared its independence. After nearly two years of a tough and painful defensive war in which the Jewish people, scarcely three years after the Holocaust, lost one percent of its sons and daughters, including Holocaust survivors, the invaders were expelled. Under United Nations auspices armistice agreements were signed with the invading states.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Yisrael Harel Former Chairman of the Council of Jewish Settlements in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza District</p>	<p>“Our conflict began when Jewish immigrants arrived in Palestine intending to establish a political entity for the Jewish people on this land - land already home to Palestinians. One of the strategies employed by these immigrants included the forceful taking of land belonging to Palestinian farmers. Then in 1948, 800,000 Palestinians were expelled and fled from their land, becoming refugees. Jewish militias carried out a series of massacres intending to frighten villagers with a dire fate if they remained. Finally, once the land had come under Jewish control, 400 Palestinian villages were entirely demolished to prevent their inhabitants from returning. This erasing of the landscape was not the result of an earthquake or nature taking its course, but the willful act of human beings against an entire community.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ghassan Khatib, Former Minister of Labor in the Palestinian Authority</p>
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2. What are the conflicting views as to the effects of the war?

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1. What conflicting views are offered as to why the war began?

<p>Suggested Answer: <i>The war began when the Arab countries invaded Israel.</i> Evidence: <i>“initiated by the Arabs,” “Five Arab armies...invaded the country that had that day declared its independence”</i></p>	<p>Suggested Answer: <i>The war began when Jewish immigrants forced Palestinians off their land.</i> Evidence: <i>“forceful taking of land,” “Palestinians were expelled...becoming refugees”</i></p>
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2. What are the conflicting views as to the effects of the war?

<p>Suggested Answer: <i>The Jewish people suffered many casualties yet defeated the Arab countries.</i> Evidence: <i>“the Jewish people, scarcely three years after the Holocaust, lost one percent of its sons and daughters, including Holocaust survivors, the invaders were expelled”</i></p> <p>Suggested Answer: <i>The United Nations set borders after the war.</i> Evidence: <i>“Under United Nations auspices armistice agreements were signed with the invading states”</i></p>	<p>Suggested Answer: <i>Palestinians were killed, forced to leave their homes with their villages destroyed.</i> Evidence: <i>“800,000 Palestinians were expelled and fled from their land,” “Jewish militias carried out a series of massacres,” “400 Palestinian villages were entirely demolished”</i></p> <p>Suggested Answer: <i>Israel had acted to “erase” the Palestinians.</i> Evidence: <i>“This erasing of the landscape was not the result of an earthquake or nature taking its course, but the willful act of human beings against an entire community.”</i></p>
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