

Fateful decisions: “Reliving” 1947-1948

Lesson plan for junior high/high school

These lessons are designed to be used in a program for junior high school or high school students. You may also decide to make this more of a family education program and invite parents to participate.

If you decide to invite students with their parents, please also see our lesson plans for adults, which will offer ideas for how to structure the time when parents are working separately from the students.

1. Begin by asking participants what they know about the creation of the State of Israel. What dates and events are important? Who populated the land of Israel at the time and what was the demographic distribution of population? What was the role of the British Mandate, the Balfour Declaration, and lastly, the U.N. Partition vote on November 29, 1947 in the founding of the State? What was the result of the Partition Plan (e.g. war, Arab refugees, British pull-out, declaration of State with different borders than those proposed by the Partition Plan)? You may want to consider the role that the Holocaust played in shaping the founding of Israel as well as the politics surrounding the displacement of Arab refugees (estimated by Israeli historian Benny Morris to be between 600,000-760,000). You may want to consult the following websites for more information:

For information about the British Mandate:

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

For information about the Balfour Declaration of 1917:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balfour_Declaration_of_1917

For information about the U.N. Partition Plan:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1947_UN_Partition_Plan

For the complete text of the U.N resolution approving partition:

<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/un/res181.htm>

2. Share the two letters (Nov. 30, 1947 and Nov. 29, 1948) written by Zipporah Porath with your students. You can have them read the letters aloud, or for a more dramatic effect, tape someone (preferably a young person, 18-22 years old) in advance reading them with emotion – an aspiring actor, perhaps. Play the recording, interrupting only to explain that the second letter is written one year later.
3. Have students dramatize the two letters. Break the students into two groups – one to act out the first letter and one to act out the second letter. (If parents are also there, you can have all the students act out both letters.)

For the performance itself (especially for the Nov. 30, 1947 letter), simulate listening to the U.N. vote. You can connect a speaker to a laptop and use the following web site:

http://www.knesset.gov.il/holidays/eng/29nov_e.htm

While preparing the letter skits, encourage discussion about the following questions:

On the letter from November 30, 1947

- Why is this moment so exciting for Zippy and her friends? What does the U.N. approval of the Partition Plan mean to these young Jews?
- What might be frightening about this moment for them? What might be some of their concerns about what is to come?
- How did the mood change after the first attacks started? (See “later that night” part of Zippy’s letter.)
- How do you imagine feeling after leaving the public celebration, sitting alone in your room, like Zippy?
- Consider other perspectives on this dramatic moment. (For background to this question, discuss the people who opposed the Partition Plan – e.g. Arab leaders, Jews in the extreme nationalist

groups the Irgun and Lehi, many British leaders – and the reasons for their opposition.)

On the letter from November 29, 1948

- Zippy describes her feelings watching a parade of people who were no longer “underground fighters” or “partisans” but proud “soldiers of the Jewish State.” What differentiates the official soldiers from the earlier underground fighters?
 - How do you imagine the parade might have been perceived by others, such as the departing British soldiers or Arab residents of Jerusalem?
 - If you were present in 1948 as the State of Israel was taking shape, as Zippy was, what would be your best hopes and your worst fears for the country?
 - What does Zippy mean when she says that “a fighting people hasn’t time to be sentimental”?
 - What does Zippy mean when she says, “This is now my HOME”? What does “home” mean to you? Do you think of Israel as “home”? Why or why not? How do you think we should relate to the other people who consider the same land their home?
4. If there are parents or other people present, allow them to ask questions of the actors – similar to a post-play “talk back” program. Encourage them to discuss what they believe happened in the year in between the vote and Zipporah Porath’s second letter, and how this informed their skits. If the program is just for the performers, then let each group ask the other performers about what they thought the interim year might have been like.

This can also be an opportunity to connect contemporary Israel with the historical period covered in Zippy’s letters. How do the students feel about Israel today, and how does their contemporary perspective inform how they read Zippy’s letters? Given some of the contemporary

challenges in Israel, do they have other questions about the events of 1947-1948 that Zippy's letters don't address?

5. As an alternative to skits, try a letter writing activity. Three options are listed below:
 - a) Ask the students to take Zippy's two letters and imagine her life in yet another year (1949). Do they believe that Zippy will still be living in Jerusalem or will she have gone home? (Make sure not to tell them what Zippy actually did with the rest of her life until after this part of the program). Do they think she will play a part in the future of the state of Israel? Will she be an active Zionist working in the U.S.? Will she remain in Israel to help build the country from the inside? Will she have become a critic of the war? Ask the students to write another letter from Zippy, either to her family in the U.S. or to her friends remaining in Israel from the perspective of November 1949.
 - b) Have the students write letters to their families as if they themselves were in Israel in 1947. How do they think they would calm their family's fears, express their hopes, etc.? Do they think they would stay in Israel? Would they join the Haganah the way Zippy did? Or do they imagine a different experience? If they returned home, how might they feel? If they stayed, why, and what would be their concerns?

Have students share these letters and ask questions of each other. Facilitate a discussion about what they imagine it would have been like to be away from their family and in another country during a war, and what would inform their decision about how to respond to the situation.

Ask them if they think that gender would play a role in their decision. Would the male students feel more or less inclined to stay

in Israel and fight? What would the female students do? What do they think the parents of sons or daughters would have thought in 1947?

- c) Have the students write letters describing the events that Zippy depicts, but from another perspective, e.g. a British soldier, an Arab resident, a newly arrived refugee from Europe. What would the events of 1947 and 1948 mean to them? (This activity will require students to have some basic background in the different perspectives on the time period, so make sure to review the information provided on the websites listed at the beginning of the lesson plan.)
6. If parents are present, have them read their children's letters, and write or speak back to their children. How would they respond to their children's letters? Are they proud, afraid, or confused as to why their children may have made the choices that they did? This is a good time to open a discussion about what Jews in America might have been feeling at the time period in which Zippy wrote her letters. Have them consider such factors as:
- the post-Holocaust time period
 - American institutions dedicated to helping the efforts in Israel
 - the small number of Americans who knew anyone living in Israel during this time period

How do they think they would feel about a son or a daughter being in Israel at this time (1947-48)? Would they feel differently today? Why or why not?

7. Conclude with a conversation about the meaning of Zionism today.
- What does the "Zionist dream" mean to you?
 - Zippy's letters reflect the perspective of a young woman with many hopes and dreams for the new State of Israel. From your vantage point today, in what ways do you think Israel has realized the

Zionist dream (however you define it) and in what ways has it fallen short?

- What are we celebrating when we celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut? How do we celebrate and also address the unfinished aspects of Zionism?
- In commemorating Israel's Independence Day, what is our responsibility to consider other perspectives on the events of 1948? (You may want to bring for discussion the following article from *Ha'aretz* about the recent decision of the Jewish National Fund to add to the signs in its parks information about the Palestinian villages that were once located there:
<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/950689.html>)
- What do you think the relationship of American Jews to Israel should be today?
- What do you think are the biggest issues in Israeli society today? (If the students need more background on issues, some examples to mention are: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the religious-secular divide, ethnic discrimination and racism, what it means for a Jewish state to be a democracy, etc.)
- What are your hopes for Israel in the next 60 years?