

Activities

Activity 2

The History and Psychology of Suicide Bombers

Preparation:

Estimated Time: 1-2 class periods • **Materials:** Students should have access to the Web for relevant materials; without such access, these materials from the Web should be reproduced. The teacher should also show videos of suicide bombers' last statements so students can analyze their motives based on their own words. Palestine Media Watch has videos of suicide bombers' last statements at www.pmw.org.il.

Background: When secular Palestinian terrorist groups (such as the PLO, Fatah and PFLP) began their terrorist activities in the late 1960s and early 1970s, suicide bombing was not one of the methods used. In recent years, suicide bombing has become a major terrorist weapon against Israeli citizens and has been adopted by radical Islamic terrorist groups that target western nations, such as Al-Qaeda. For example, the attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, as well as many attacks in Iraq, have resulted from this terrorist weapon. The following activity explores its history and psychology.

Activity:

- The teacher starts the lesson by presenting an orientation to the topic of suicide bombing. (See “Background” above.)
- Give the students 10 minutes to work together in groups and to list the various questions that they would like to ask regarding this phenomenon.
- Present these questions in class. Organize the questions about suicide bombing into three groups:
 - (a) History (e.g., When was suicide bombing first used as a terrorist weapon? How and when did it develop?)
 - (b) Psychology (e.g., What is the ideology behind this phenomenon? What is its goal? What can help us understand why there are so many potential suicide bombers? What, if any, are the connections to radical Islam? Who are the suicide bombers, and what motivates them?)
 - (c) Countries Affected by Suicide Bombing (e.g., Where have suicide bombings occurred and when? (They have occurred throughout the world, from Chechnya to Madrid to Asia.))
 - (c) Other (e.g., Which countries support the use of suicide bombers? What does the United Nations say about suicide bombers? To what extent is suicide bombing supported and even promoted by local Palestinian society? What does this sort of support do to the fabric of that society?)
- Divide the students into groups to research these questions. These groups may be subdivided to help students focus on the relevant issues. Provide each group with relevant resources (Web sites, printed materials, newspaper articles, etc.; see below). Give them a specified amount of time (20-30 minutes) to review this information in class. As an option, extend the activity to include two class periods so students can spend time at home examining the questions before they report in class.
- Have each group present its question and its findings to the entire class.

Wrap-Up: There is good evidence that the rise of suicide bombing is related to the rise of radical Islam. The motivation for many suicide bombers, including the September 11 terrorists, is based on the ideology of radical Islam, i.e., jihad (defined more as a commandment to “kill the infidels,” as opposed to an effort to subdue one’s own emotions, as seen in Sufi Islam) and a better afterlife.