

Activities

Activity 1

Comparing Refugees: A Dramatic Simulation

Preparation:

Estimated Time: One class period • **Materials:** Paper and pencils.

Lesson Plan: The first part of the activity has been designed as a catalyst that will motivate the students to read and discuss the text (pp. 14-15).

Background:

Refugees are an unfortunate but common result of war. During and after World War II, millions of people were displaced from their homes. After the war, some returned to their homes, but many were resettled elsewhere.

What happened to the Jewish and Arab refugees that resulted from Israel's War of Independence?

This activity will explore this question.

Activity:

Introduction: Ask the students to openly talk about what they know about refugees. What is a refugee? What causes people to become refugees? What options are open to refugees? What is the responsibility of other nations for the fate of refugees? In modern history and today, what are some examples of nations taking responsibility for refugees?

Dramatic Simulation: Divide the students into two groups. The students will take on the identities of high school students living during the years 1945-1950. One group will represent Jews who lived in Arab countries. The other group will represent Arabs who lived in Palestine before 1948. Within each of these two groups, have the students work in pairs.

Two Sets of Questions: Have the students imagine that they are living in their respective countries during a time of strife. Ask them to discuss and write answers to the following questions: "Should I leave my home or stay here? If I have to leave my home during the war, what options should I consider about where to go and what to take with me?" Have them be as specific as possible. Give students about 20 minutes to discuss and write their answers in pairs.

Now have the students imagine that they've had to leave their homes during the conflict and have not been allowed to return home. Ask them to discuss the following questions: "What options do I have now? Where should I go?"

Now have the students discuss their answers in class. For the first set of questions, the students might imagine that they could eventually return to their homes after the end of the conflict. For the second set of questions, the students might imagine other places in the world where they might want to settle.

What Actually Happened? Now have the students find out what actually happened by asking them to read the text (pp. 14-15). Discuss the text with the students. What was the fate of the Jewish refugees after they were forced to leave their homes in Arab countries? What was the fate of the Palestinians who fled or were forced to leave their homes during Israel's War of Independence? What caused these different fates? If you have access to the Internet, look up this article, published in CAMERA (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America): "Why Palestinians Still Live in Refugee Camps" (www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7&x_issue=52&x_article=960).

Show students the short speech that Gina Waldman, a Jewish refugee from Libya, delivered to the UN Human Rights Council on March 19, 2008, at www.un.org/webcast/unhrc/archive.asp?go=080319. (Scroll down to NGOs, B'nai B'rith statement.)

Wrap-Up: The options available to these two sets of refugees were theoretically identical. In reality, the results couldn't have been more different:

- All the Jews who were forced to leave their homes in Arab countries were absorbed by other countries. Most were absorbed by the young Israeli state, where they began to create new lives for themselves, with new possibilities. Their offspring did not consider themselves to be refugees. In fact, the plight of the Jewish refugees from Arab countries, during and soon after Israel's War of Independence, has nearly been forgotten.
- On the other hand, Arabs who left or were forced to leave their homes in 1948 were never absorbed by the surrounding Arab states. Instead, they lived in refugee camps under very restrictive living conditions. Since then, most of the refugees have continued to live in these camps. Their children and children's children still consider themselves to be refugees.