

TALKING ABOUT ISRAEL & PALESTINE

The situation in Israel and Palestine continues to dominate the news and is the topic of fraught conversations around the world. The history of this region and the associated conflict stretches millenia, making it difficult to understand the nuances, complexities, and deeply held beliefs on both sides. The understandably strong emotions felt by Israelis, Palestinians, and more generally, by Jewish and Arab and Muslim communities around the world add heat to an already combusive situation.

We at Woven Teaching, like so many millions around the world, have been deeply distressed by the news coming out of Israel and Palestine. The October 7 terrorist attack by Hamas on Israeli civilians was the deadliest attack on Jews since the Holocaust—1,400 people were killed and over 4,000 were wounded, in addition to nearly 200 people taken hostage by Hamas militants. For most Israelis, this was a horrific act of terrorism and a provocation by Hamas. For many Palestinians, these attacks were viewed as a justified response to decades of Israeli subjugation and occupation.

The ensuing siege on Gaza by Israel has killed thousands of Palestinians—more than 4,100 and at least 12,000 wounded at the time of writing—worsening an already extreme humanitarian crisis in the territory. The murder of civilians and the blocking of food, water, electricity, and fuel from entering Gaza continue to have very serious and deadly consequences.

For a brief timeline of the Israel-Palestine conflict, please see this [backgrounder](#) from the United Nations.

The escalating emotions surrounding this conflict have created fertile ground for both antisemitism and anti-Muslim sentiment. The leadership in Israel and in Gaza continue to amplify the hate by their use of incendiary and demeaning language. The Israeli administration continues to use degrading and dehumanizing language to speak about Palestinians. Comparing humans to animals has long been a tactic used to dehumanize people seen as enemies or as “other”; referring to one’s enemies as less than human strips people of their humanity and allows and even encourages acts of hate and violence. Hamas’ continued vilification of all Jewish people is horrible and unacceptable—dehumanizing language from either side of the conflict fans the flames of hate and leaves both Muslim and Jewish communities in danger. In the United States, we are already seeing a drastic increase in anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim incidents and crimes, including the murder of a Palestinian-American child in Illinois.

Over the past two weeks, we have seen myriad violations of international human rights treaties and international humanitarian law. At present, the situation continues to worsen by the hour. We do not assume to have all the answers to challenging questions, but do hope to offer some useful resources and guidelines for educators who want to have candid discussions with their students about this fraught and divisive topic.



WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO?

1. Be aware of your own biases. Remaining neutral or unbiased is virtually impossible. Knowing this, how can teachers examine and counter our own biases? Learning for Justice's *Critical Practices for Social Justice Education* can help you learn how to examine your biases and create an open and welcoming environment for your students.
2. Recognize the pain of Jewish and Muslim communities. We have heard many reports of Jewish students feeling unsafe at school. Similarly, Arab-American and Muslim students are watching unspeakable violence toward their communities. Historically, both of these groups have been victims of violence and oppression. As events unfold, this painful history may play a role in amplifying their understandable fears and anxieties. Caution students against making generalizations.
3. Encourage students to be kind and patient with themselves and each other. Adults are having a difficult time understanding and navigating this conflict; imagine how challenging this is for a child.
4. Always review any materials before sharing with students. News and content related to the situation in Israel and Palestine often contains graphic images that may be disturbing to many students. Consider whether any graphic content you share with students, or being shared between students in class, has pedagogical value.
5. Don't look to students to speak on behalf of their community, religion, or nationality. Remind students that no community is a monolith—there are Jews and Israelis who are speaking out against Israel's actions and there are Palestinians who have decried the attack by Hamas. Within any community, there is a great deal of dissent and difference of opinion. Ask students to speak from their individual experience and not as representatives of a specific group.
6. Be precise with language. Define the vocabulary being used to describe the conflict and its impact. Be clear to make a distinction between elected leaders and civilians. Highlight the difference between talking about the Israeli government and its policies and Israeli citizens. Similarly, remind students to differentiate between Hamas and Palestinians. These definitions get further complicated by referring to "all Jews" or "all Muslims". It is possible to critique Israel's policies and actions in a way that does not assign guilt or blame to all Israelis or to Jewish people as a whole. Similarly, it is possible to critique the actions of Hamas without assigning guilt or blame to all Palestinians or Muslims / Arabs.
7. Remind students that peace is possible. Hopelessness can lead to inaction. Have students research global conflicts where huge progress and social change was made: the Northern Ireland conflict (the "Troubles") was a violent sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland from 1968-1998; Apartheid was the system of institutionalized racial segregation in South Africa and South West Africa (now Namibia) between 1948 and the early 1990s. Both of these violent and deeply-entrenched conflicts were once viewed as intractable with little hope for resolution. Encourage students to learn about the Israel / Gaza conflict and to identify specific actions they can take to work towards peace.

RESOURCES

SPEAKING ABOUT ISRAEL AND PALESTINE (AND OTHER CHALLENGING TOPICS)

- **Explaining the News to Our Kids**, Common Sense Media
- **Let's Talk! Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students**, Learning for Justice
- **How to talk to kids about the violence in Israel and Gaza**, NPR

ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

- **Questions and Answers: October 2023 Hostilities between Israel and Palestinian Armed Groups**, Human Rights Watch
- **Daily News Lesson: Israel cuts off food, water and fuel to Gaza amid bombardment**, PBS
- **Daily News Lesson: War grips Israel, Gaza after surprise Hamas attack**, PBS
- **The Palestine Question**, United Nations

ISLAMOPHOBIA AND ANTISEMITISM

- **Address Antisemitism (for Educators)**, Anti-Defamation League (ADL)
- **Resources about Islamophobia**, Islamic Networks Group
- **Countering Islamophobia**, Learning for Justice
- **Responding to Hate and Bias at School**, Learning for Justice
- **Anti-Semitism 101**, My Jewish Learning

COUNTERING MISINFORMATION

- **Checkology**, News Literacy Project
- **Fighting Fake News**, KQED
- **Uncovering Misinformation: Expression, Propaganda, and Human Rights**, Woven Teaching

HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

- **The Geneva Conventions and their Commentaries**, International Committee of the Red Cross
- **International Law**, United Nations
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, United Nations

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UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

STUDENT VERSION

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| 1 All human beings are born equal in dignity and in rights. | 2 These rights belong to everyone. You should never be discriminated against. | 3 You have the right to life, liberty, and safety. |
| 4 No one can hold you in slavery. | 5 No one can torture you or treat you in a cruel or degrading way. | 6 Everyone has rights, no matter where they are. |
| 7 Laws should be applied the same way for everyone. | 8 You have the right to seek justice and remedy (repair) if your rights are not respected. | 9 You cannot be imprisoned or thrown out of a country without a good reason. |
| 10 You have the right to a public trial. | 11 You should be presumed innocent until proven guilty. | 12 You have a right to privacy. No one can enter your home, read without good reason. |
| 13 You have the right to move and travel within your country and internationally. | 14 You have the right to seek protection from another country (asylum) if your country treats you poorly. | 15 You have the right to be a citizen of a country (have a nationality). |
| 16 Every adult has the right to get married and have a family. | 17 You have the right to own property. | 18 You have the right to practice any religion. |
| 19 You have the right to express your opinion. | 20 You have the right to gather with others and protest publicly. | 21 You have the right to participate in the government of your country (e.g. vote). |
| 22 You have the right to have your basic needs met (e.g. through social security programs). | 23 You have the right to work, to receive equal pay for equal work, and to join a union. | 24 You have the right to rest from work. |
| 25 You have the right to an adequate standard of living, including housing, food, and medical care. | 26 You have the right to an education. | 27 No one can stop you from participating in your community's cultural life. |
| 28 Everyone must respect the social order that allows these rights to exist. | 29 Everyone must respect the rights of others. | 30 No one can take any of the rights in this declaration away from you. |

WHO WE ARE

Woven Teaching is the human rights education practice of Woven Foundation. Through a combination of original programming and grantmaking, Woven Teaching advances the foundation’s focus on long-term change towards a widespread acceptance of basic human rights for all.

Our programmatic work is dedicated to supporting classroom teachers with practical help for ethical and effective instruction. We believe that by weaving human rights education into the curriculum, we can help educators create socially responsible global citizens.

Woven Teaching envisions a world in which every student’s education includes:

- A sense of historical perspective;
- The development of critical thinking skills;
- A feeling of global citizenship;
- The ability to identify bigotry—understanding its negative effects on both individuals and society—and the analytical tools to combat it.

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