

Support for Classroom Discussion on the Hamas-Israel War

Dear Educator,

As you know, the Institute for Curriculum Services (ICS) is dedicated to supporting your instruction and your students' learning on topics related to Jews, Judaism, and Jewish history, including the Arab-Israeli conflict.

For many students and educators, the scale and violence of the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 and the tragic events that have unfolded since, have evoked many different thoughts and emotions. You and members of your school community may be worrying about loved ones or mourning a personal loss in Israel or in Gaza. The continued effects of the Oct 7 attacks in Israel and the enormity of the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza will likely continue to spur difficult but important conversations with your students.

We have created this resource to provide you with tools to help facilitate those conversations. You will find resources on the following:

- [ICS's "Teaching the History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict Using Primary Sources" curriculum](#)
- *Guiding discussions on difficult topics*
- *Making sense of the news and social media (including avoiding misinformation and awareness of harmful mental health impacts)*

We are thankful to you for doing the challenging but essential work of guiding the next generation of global citizens. We hope that this compilation of resources is helpful to you as you unpack the events of this tragedy.

With gratitude for your work,

The staff of the Institute for Curriculum Services

HISTORY HELPS

At ICS, we take an historical approach to learning about the Arab-Israeli conflict and peace process, treating the conflict as part of modern history that emerged over a century ago. [In our curriculum on the History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict](#), the primary source and supplementary materials trace the development of the conflict from the late 19th century to the early 2000s, providing global, Middle Eastern, and European contexts for deep and nuanced understanding of this complicated topic. As mentioned, Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 coincided with the 50th anniversary of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, when a coalition of Arab states launched a surprise attack on Israel during the holiest day of the Jewish year. ICS's video "[War and Peace Part 1](#)" may be particularly helpful for some historical context on the significance of the anniversary.

The following resources (lesson plans, primary source documents, maps, document analysis tools, student engagement activities, and videos) can be used to develop or deepen your understanding of the conflict. Please include them in ways that fit your needs for instruction. We have found that students consider the [videos](#) particularly helpful in gaining a nuanced understanding of the history.

ICS Lesson	Summary of Lesson	Supporting Animated Video
1: Zionism & Arab Nationalism	The origins of the Arab-Israeli conflict can be traced to the early 20th century, with the emergence of nationalism. In this lesson, students will use primary sources such as "The Jewish State" (1896) and excerpts from The First Arab Congress (1913) to explore the concept of nationalism and connect the rise of nationalism in Europe to the emergence of both Zionism and Arab nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.	Land Matters
2: Broken Promises	This lesson examines how broken promises made to Arabs and Jews during World War I set the stage for the current challenges in the Middle East. Students will examine primary sources, including The Hussein-McMahon Correspondence (1915), The Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916), and The Balfour Declaration (1917), which were written during and shortly after World War I.	Promises, Promises
3: The Mandate Era	After World War I, the League of Nations created mandates and placed the area that is today Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and Jordan under British administration. This area is referred to as the British Mandate for Palestine. While meant to be temporary, the British Mandate for Palestine lasted for nearly 30 years. In this lesson, students will examine official	A Place to Belong

	statements and proposals regarding how the British Mandate for Palestine should be divided between Jews and Arabs.	
4: From Independence to Egypt-Israel Peace	This lesson explains how the State of Israel was created in 1948. Students will also explore the wars of 1948 and 1967, as well as the 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. Also explained in the video is the 1973 Yom Kippur War, when a coalition of Arab states launched a surprise attack on Israel during the holiest day of the Jewish year. The October 2023 Hamas attack came on the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War.	War and Peace Pt. 1
5. The Continuing Conflict & Peace Process	At the end of the 1970s, it seemed like progress was being made toward peace between Arab countries and Israel. Unfortunately, new obstacles surfaced in the decades following. The primary sources in this lesson focus on the First Intifada (1987–93), the Second Intifada (2000–05), the 1993 Declaration of Principles (Oslo Accords), the 1994 peace agreement between Israel and Jordan, and Israel’s 2005 disengagement from Gaza.	War and Peace Pt. 2

Additional Instructional Resources from ICS

- [ICS’s Historical and Modern Maps of the Eastern Mediterranean](#)
- [Timeline of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: 1967 to the Present](#) (Note: This timeline has been updated with a high-level summary of the current Hamas-Israel war.)

Professional Development

If you are interested in taking a deeper dive into the history of this conflict, you can participate in ICS’s free, self-paced, online course “Teaching the History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict Using Primary Sources.” It is a five-module, self-paced course offering an in-depth learning experience on the conflict. You can learn more about this asynchronous learning opportunity by clicking [HERE](#).

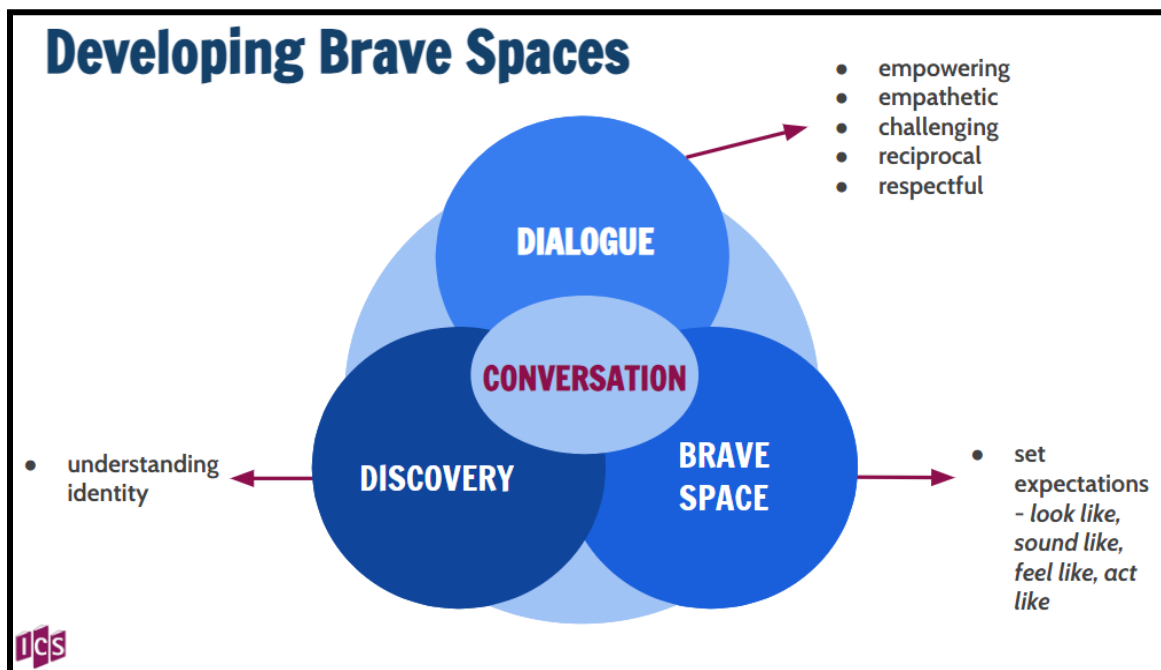
GUIDING DISCUSSIONS ON DIFFICULT TOPICS

Teaching students how to have conversations about challenging topics not only enhances their cognitive and communication skills but also promotes empathy, understanding, and critical thinking. These skills are essential for personal growth and for creating a more informed, inclusive, and democratic society.

It is not always easy or comfortable to have these conversations, but it is important to help students become more informed about controversial issues, build skills in media and news literacy, and consider alternative perspectives. The ADL offers perspective on this concept in their article “[Moving from Safe Classrooms to Brave Classrooms](#).”

The ADL article defines “brave” in this way: “to have or show physical, emotional or moral strength in the face of difficulty, danger or fear.” When you’re brave, you do something that is hard for you. In a classroom or group, bravery goes both ways—giving and receiving. This means taking a risk to say something that is difficult or scary. It is also brave to listen fully and hear hard things that people may tell you. A brave space is one in which we accept that we will feel uncomfortable and maybe even defensive when exploring issues of bias, injustice and oppression. A brave space is one in which we take risks, doing so with care and compassion.”

So, how do educators create a brave space in the classroom? This model, in which conversation is central, is based on a concept from [The Religious Freedom Center](#). It may be helpful in envisioning the components critical to creating an open, safe, brave, and inclusive environment in the classroom.



In this model, student **discovery** of themselves and others happens when:

- They understand their own identity. Who students are and where they come from influence how they understand and see the world, allowing them to speak honestly from their own perspective.
- They listen with an open mind and ask good questions that invite others to tell their stories. Classmates may respectfully challenge these questions because it’s okay to disagree.
- They understand it’s okay to disagree. Guide your students to understand that disagreement should focus on the *idea*, not the person, and that they should provide a reasoned explanation for their point of view.

Additionally, **dialogue** is about understanding the “other”—whether it’s a person, group, or idea—and being understood ourselves. Through dialogue, students understand that understanding is not about convincing or persuading. Rather, it’s about being open to exploring different perspectives, experiences, and beliefs. *Dialogue should be empowering, empathetic, challenging, reciprocal, and respectful.*

Creating a **brave space** should begin with teachers and students working together to agree on a common understanding of expectations and protocols for interaction.

Suggestions for Digital Resources and Student Prompts

Using a digital collaboration tool like [Padlet](#) or [FigJam](#), pose the following prompts to your students and have them work together to design their safe space.

- What does a brave space look like?
- What does a brave space feel like?
- What does a brave space sound like?
- What behaviors are important in a brave space?

Additional Resources for Difficult Discussions

- [Fostering Civil Discourse: How do we Talk about Issues that Matter](#)
- [5 Ways To Practice Constructive Dialogue In The Classroom](#)
- [Students Who Have Experienced a Crisis](#)

MAKING SENSE OF THE NEWS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Living in a digital world means access to news 24/7. Constant access to news has been shown to increase the risk of anxiety, depression, and illness. Those risks are further exacerbated during times of war, when violent pictures and videos are shared on the news and social media. You may wish to engage your students in a conversation about the negative effects of exposure to graphic videos and photos (and how there are images you cannot “unsee”). Also consider discussing the ethical questions around viewing extremely disturbing images and videos.

In addition to the mental health toll that news and social media exposure may have on students, there are the serious challenges of ascertaining the veracity and accuracy of information that is shared by news outlets and on social media.

Major media outlets (including [NBC](#) and [AP](#)) have reported on the spread of misinformation about the Hamas-Israel war on social media. Educating students about careful media consumption is critical both for gaining and processing accurate understanding of events and for protecting students from graphic images and videos. [Research](#) has shown that children are highly susceptible to believing misinformation. Therefore, it is critical—especially during a time when all media outlets and platforms (TV, radio, Internet, social media, etc.) are continually reporting about the violence and devastation—to teach students how to identify mis- and disinformation, and how not to contribute to its spread.

Reading news from a variety of domestic and international media is an important way to learn how to be a critical consumer of news media, and how to identify biases and misinformation. When it comes to this war, students should pay particular attention to casualty statistics including the source of those numbers, the extent to which they distinguish between civilians and combatants, and the extent to which they specify who was responsible. Comparing American, Israeli, and Arab news sources on this element of reporting can be especially illuminating as to the ways in which media shape understanding of a conflict.

Be sure to provide students with clear guidance and understanding about the dangers of misinformation, as well as over-stimulation from too much news consumption.

Narrowing Down the News

[According to the News Literacy Project](#) (NLP), these are five steps for vetting news sources:

1. **Do a quick search:** Conducting a simple search for information about a news source is a key first step in evaluating its credibility.
2. **Look for standards:** Reputable news organizations aspire to ethical guidelines and standards, including fairness, accuracy and independence.
3. **Check for transparency:** Quality news sources should be transparent, not only about their reporting practices (see above), but also about their ownership and funding.
4. **Examine how errors are handled:** Credible news sources are accountable for mistakes and for correcting them. Do you see evidence that this source corrects or clarifies errors?
5. **Assess news coverage:** An important step in vetting sources is taking time to read and assess several news articles.

In addition, the organization includes a list of “trust busters” that indicate you should immediately look elsewhere for credible news. They include:

- False or untrue content
- Clickbait tactics
- Lack of balance
- Manipulated images or videos
 - [A Beginner’s Guide to Deepfakes](#) by Safer Schools
- State-run or state-sponsored propaganda
- Dangerous, offensive, and malicious content

Additional Resources for Detecting Misinformation in the Media

- [Civic Online Reasoning](#) curriculum by Stanford History Education Group. Many media and news literacy programs have little empirical research on their impacts on middle and high school students. Dr. Sam Wineburg and colleagues conducted an experiment with 40,000 high school students. They found that students who took the course were more capable of evaluating websites and credibility of online claims.
- An [infographic](#) from the NLP on detecting **misinformation in the media**.
- Videos for identifying fake news:
 - Suitable for elementary grades:

- [“What is fake news - explained.” CBC Kids News](#)
- Suitable for middle and high school:
 - [“Can you trust the news? How to tell the difference between real and fake news,” CBC Kids News](#)
 - [“Fake News: How to spot it,” BBC My World](#)
 - [“The rise of ‘fake news,’ manipulation and ‘alternative facts,’” BBC Newsnight](#)
- [“Helping Students Identify Fake News with the Five C's of Critical Consuming”](#)
- [Fact-Checking Websites](#)

Social Media Support

It is accurate and appropriate to assume that the majority of news our students consume come from social media platforms like Instagram, SnapChat, and TikTok. While these platforms provide avenues for connection and learning for students, they can also be forums that can, if not managed, negatively affect students' lives.

In May 2023, the Surgeon General issued an [advisory](#) about the damaging impacts of social media on youth mental health. Other research has specifically examined the impact of violent imagery on youth, and the harmful effects are clear. Extremely disturbing images and videos have been widely shared on social media and even through mainstream news outlets (usually with warnings). As the Hamas-Israel war continues to unfold, it is likely that the videos and images shared through social media will become even more horrifying.

This article from [The Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley](#) offers 11 tips to share with your students—and yourself—to ensure safe and healthy social media habits during times of crisis (and always). As the coverage of the war is likely to get increasingly more gruesome and upsetting, we recommend focusing on the tip below (excerpted from the article) with your students:

Have a reason to look or watch. Start with being intentional about why you are viewing a potentially disturbing video or photograph on social media—even if this intention is simply to be engaged with the news of our world. Consider whether you can get the information in some other way, including through a medium that may not be as emotive or graphic as raw video, such as a newspaper article or other professionally packaged piece.

Consider asking your students these guiding questions provided in order to evaluate their consumption of violent images and videos. Have students ask themselves:

- Why am I watching this? What is my reason for wanting to see this?
- How might watching this help or hurt me?
- If I want to understand what is happening in the world, is there a different medium/source through which I can acquire information and understanding?
- If I feel it is important to watch, are there things I can do to limit potential harm or distress? For example:

- Can I watch this away from my bedroom to protect that space for safety and sleep?
- Can I scroll through thumbnails to help me decide if I really want to watch?
- Can I mute sound or watch the video on a smaller screen?

Additional Resources for Healthy Social Media Habits Specific to the Hamas-Israel War

- [How to change settings on social media accounts to limit graphic social media images from the Hamas-Israel war](#), The Washington Post

This article frames the notion of personal responsibility on social media when it comes to sharing content. For example:

But you need to know that some of the videos, photos and posts you're seeing on social media might be fake or misleading. They may also violate the dignity, privacy and human rights of people in those images and videos.

It may be helpful to read and discuss this article with your students, paying attention to the questions that are raised, such as, "If I share this image and it gets more widely seen, will I inadvertently share this with the mom, dad, or friend of the person in this video?"

Should you want additional resources on Jews, Judaism, and Jewish history for greater context, please visit our [website](#), including our Israel-Hamas War [Glossary of Terms](#). Additionally, our professional learning team is available to deliver a no-cost workshop on our Arab-Israeli conflict curriculum, as well as all of our offerings. If this service would be of help, please reach out to us at info@icsresources.org.