

LA Unified Statement on the Teaching of Potentially Controversial Subjects in the Classroom

Although ethnic studies instruction is firmly rooted in an interdisciplinary analysis and critique of systems and patterns of oppression, teachers in LA Unified are tasked with delivering instruction that, while providing inquiry-driven opportunities for students to grapple with such issues, is based on district and state education policy focused on developing students' critical thinking skills.

Moreover, given the position of authority a teacher holds in the classroom, a professional stance of neutrality on topics such as politics is crucial to avoid conflict, perceptions of bias, and concerns regarding the overall inclusiveness of diverse subject matters during instructional time. Consistent with the board resolution regarding the respectful treatment of all persons, the District does not restrict teachers from discussions during duty-free time.

Sample Lesson: Conflict in the Middle East

Topic: Middle Eastern Conflicts

Theme: Identity

Standards Alignment:

- CA HSS Analysis Skills (9–12): Chronological and Spatial Thinking 1; Historical Interpretation 1, 3, 4
- CCSS ELA/Literacy: W.9–10.7; CCSS ELA/Literacy: W.11–12.7; CCSS ELA/Literacy: W.11–12.8; CCSS ELA/Literacy: W.11–12.9

Purpose of the Lesson:

This lesson will introduce students to the history of conflict in the Middle East involving Israelis and Palestinians. Students will learn basic facts as well as gain a historical context of the conflicts in the Middle East that have affected the people of Israel and Palestine. In addition, students will learn how the geopolitical environment has been impacted by major historical events. Students will also be given an opportunity to understand the various competing arguments that have shaped the continuity of

disagreements regarding claims to land and nationhood in the region. A significant part of the lesson will be dedicated to students' understanding of these competing arguments through a discussion technique called Structured Academic Controversy. Students will then be given the opportunity to reflect and present varying perspectives on the topic.

Key Terms and Concepts: statehood, catastrophe, settlement, conflict, proposal







Objectives:

- Understand the historical context between competing groups that claim the same territory.
- Understand the varied intersectional conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians.
- To foster an understanding of possible solutions to a crisis that has impacted the lives of millions of people in the Middle East.

Essential Questions:

- In what way has the Middle East been shaped by competing claims to territory?
- How have the people of the Middle East been impacted by treaties conducted by outside nations?
- In what way might solutions be crafted to address historic conflicts in the Middle East between Israelis and Palestinians?

Materials:

- Slide deck:  Israeli-Palestinian_conflict.pptx
-  The Conflict in Jerusalem Is Distinctly Modern Heres the History.pdf
-  bbc.com-Israel Gaza war History of the conflict explained.pdf
-  KWL Chart
-  KWL Rubric-Conflict in the Middle East.pdf
-  Conflict in the Middle East Essay Assignment Rubric.pdf

Lesson steps/Activities:

- Warm Up:
 - Using the KWL chart, students are provided 10 minutes to write what they know about this issue under *What I Know*.
 - After 10 minutes, students are given the opportunity to voluntarily share their responses.

- Instruction:
 - Students are given the opportunity to read the article [bbc.com-Israel Gaza war History of the conflict explained.pdf](#) as a whole class.
 - Students are then given 8 minutes to enter what they would like to learn about the issue in the center column of the KWL chart titled *What I Wonder*.
 - The teacher provides students 5 minutes to share in small groups in order to hear what each student wonders about the topic.
 - The teacher presents the slide deck titled: [Israeli-Palestinian_conflict.pptx](#) , explaining each key aspect of the presentation and addressing questions using factual responses.
- Interaction:
 - Beginning on Slide 29, Part 2: Presenting the Arguments, students will be engaging in a Structured Academic Controversy activity in which they will be discussing, listening, writing, and presenting their understanding on the topic as a means of determining possible solutions.
- Conclusion:
 - Students will be given time to fill in the third column of the KWL Chart, *What I Learned*.
 - They will then be given time to share their learnings to the rest of the class.

Possible Extension Activity:

- Using what they have learned from the lesson, students could be assigned an essay in which they address the prompt in the final slide of the presentation:
 - Imagine that the United Nations has asked you to craft a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
 - What is your recommendation?
 - Make sure to justify your proposal.