



Educator's Guide

The Plight of Palestinian Refugees

This video delves into a core element of the Israeli peace process: Palestinian refugees. Why do some estimate the number of refugees to be 5 million while others count less than 1 million? Is UNRWA helping or harming these refugees? Who, if anyone, should have the right of return? How do these refugees compare to Jewish refugees who fled Arab lands in the 1940's and 1950's? There are no easy answers.

Watch this video and use these prompts to better understand this perplexing issue and help you and your students ask the key questions and develop your own perspectives on this core issue.

Link to video: <https://unpacked.education/video/refugees/>

Further Reading

1. Samuel G. Freedman, "Are Jews Who Fled Arab Lands to Israel Refugees, Too?"
2. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/11/arts/are-jews-who-fled-arab-lands-to-israel-refugees-too.html>
3. David Shayne, "The Forgotten Palestinian Refugees"
4. <https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/The-forgotten-Palestinian-refugees-567076>
5. Benny Morris, "Peace? No Chance"
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/feb/21/israel2>
7. Mitchell Bard, "The Palestinian Refugees: History & Overview"



8. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/history-and-overview-of-the-palestinian-refugees>

Review

1. The main difference between UNRWA's definition of a Palestinian refugee and the UNHCR's definition for all other refugees is that UNRWA still defines this group as refugees:
 - Male descendants (correct)
 - Female descendants
 - All descendants
 - Spouses
2. UNRWA is charged with providing basic necessities for the Palestinian refugees, but not with _____ them.
 - Educating
 - Resettling (correct)
 - Financing
 - Caring for (medically)
3. Approximately how many Palestinian refugees exist today, according to UNRWA?
 - 500,000
 - 1,000,000
 - 5,000,000 (correct)
 - 10,000,000
4. Why does the number of Palestinian refugees continue to rise while the number of refugees in other parts of the world decreases?
5. What were the different ways in which Palestinians became refugees?
6. What was the experience of Jews who fled Arab lands around 1948?



Discussion Questions

- 1.** In your opinion, does UNRWA help or hinder Palestinians by perpetuating their refugee status?
Why does UNRWA exist as a separate entity from UNHCR, the general UN council that deals with refugees? Should it?
- 2.** How would you compare and contrast the plight of the Jewish refugees from the 1948 war with the Palestinian refugees (both those in Israel and in Arab lands)? Should the international community rally behind the Jews who lost homes and land as a result of the 1948 war?
- 3.** Do you think people ever really change their minds on a topic of importance? If so, how do you think that process happens?
- 4.** Suppose tomorrow the Israeli government decides to allow all the Palestinians to return to the borders in Israel. Describe what the demographics of Israel would look like. In your opinion, should the fact that Israel would no longer be able to be a viable Jewish state (as there would be more Palestinians than Jewish people) be taken into account in navigating this challenge of absorbing Palestinians?
- 5.** One might argue that the return of refugees should not be a zero-sum game, but there can be a way to bring back some refugees and some descendants. Do you think this is a viable option? Why or why not?
- 6.** According to historians, Palestinians left in 1948 for many reasons. Some say the various pre-Israel Zionist armies forced them out, while some say Arab leaders told them to evacuate temporarily during wartime. Some people left out of fear and some left because others were leaving. To you, does it matter what the primary reason was why they left or is that historical question less relevant 70+ years later?



7. Read this [article](#) that describes why Palestinians have a “right of return” and this [article](#) that contends they do not. Think through the three most salient reasons for the “right of return” and the three most salient reasons against it.

Reflection Questions

1. Jonathan Haidt writes in his book *Righteous Mind*: “People bind themselves into political teams that share moral narratives. Once they accept a particular narrative, they become blind to alternative moral worlds.” How would you apply this idea to the great debate of the Palestinian refugees? Heterodox Academy explains “viewpoint diversity” in this [video](#). What do you make of its role in education? Use this topic as a test case.
2. This [tool](#) from Jewish Virtual Library is helpful to compare how Palestinians and Israelis differ on the cause of the refugees. The Palestinian Refugee Research Net discusses their [perspective](#). What do you think you can gain from reading this source and from watching the video along with these discussion and reflection questions?
3. See this image [here](#) of Palestinian Arabs leaving their home in 1948. Are you able to feel empathy for these people, or do you view them as enemies, who are necessary casualties of the war?
4. Pro-Israel activist Chloé Valdary frequently notes, “Criticize in order to uplift, not to tear the other person down.”
 - Ask your students to choose a position on this topic with which they vehemently disagree, to pause and consider it.
 - Ask your students to then argue with the perspective, and give suggestions to alter it.
 - Remind students to zone in on the idea and not the person.
 - Ask your students how they view that idea and if it has changed by engaging in this process.