

HISTORY OF ISRAEL EXPLAINED

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



THE KIBBUTZ: ISRAEL'S COLLECTIVE UTOPIA

Section 1: Additional Resources

- Amos Elon, *Understanding Israel: A Social Studies Approach*
- Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History*, Part 3, Chapters 10 and 11
- Noam Shpancer, "Child of the collective"
<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/feb/19/kibbutz-child-noam-shpancer>
- J.J. Goldberg, "What Actually Undermined the Kibbutz"
<https://forward.com/opinion/127122/what-actually-undermined-the-kibbutz/>
- Rachael Gelfman Schultz, "The Kibbutz Movement"
<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-kibbutz-movement/>

Section 2: Discussion Questions

- Why was pre-state and early Israel the perfect time and place for kibbutzim to flourish?
- In what ways is the collectivism of the kibbutz movement so profoundly positive, and in what ways might the collectivism of the kibbutz movement detract from society?
- One member of the kibbutz might have been a doctor, making good money outside of the kibbutz, while another did the kibbutz's laundry. They both received the exact same provisions. Is this fair? Why or why not?
- Although the kibbutz is an icon of early Israel, even at the height of its popularity only 7.5% of Israel's population lived on kibbutzim. Why do you think this is?
- The group effect of the kibbutz was so powerful, without which overcoming challenges of being without parents, without a set country and often having denied God, would be too difficult. How did the kibbutz seek to bring everyone together and become a microcosm of what the state would try to become?

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Section 3: Review

1. In two sentences or less, what makes a kibbutz a kibbutz?
2. Who was A.D. Gordon?
3. What was the first kibbutz?
 - a. Tel Aviv
 - b. Degania
 - c. Ein Hanatziv
 - d. Lotan
4. What is a kibbutz member called?
 - a. Kibbutzee
 - b. Kibbutzer
 - c. Kibbutzka
 - d. Kibbutznik

Section 4: Reflection Questions

- Amos Oz Writes: "For all its disadvantages, [the kibbutz] is the least bad, the least unkind, that I have seen anywhere.... The kibbutz is the only attempt in modern times to separate labor from material reward and this attempt is, in Martin Buber's phrase, 'an exemplary non-failure.' The kibbutz is the only attempt to establish a collective society, without compulsion, without repression, and without bloodshed or brainwashing. It is also, in retrospect, a unique attempt, for better or for worse, to reconstruct or revive the extended family... the loss of which may turn out to be the greatest loss in modern life."
- When you think of the words, "an exemplary non-failure," how is the kibbutz movement a fascinating example of such an idea?
- Can you imagine living on a kibbutz? In what ways would your life be the same, and in what ways would your life be vastly different?
- In this article, Noam Shpancer, who grew up on a kibbutz, describes his childhood experiences. He states that the kibbutz was a wonderful place for kids, in some ways, but discusses the darker aspects of it as well. He writes, "The pressure to conform was relentless. Individuality and competition were looked down upon." Why did the kibbutz strive to breed conformity and sameness? In the 21st century, individuality is a supreme value; can you imagine what it would be like to grow up in such a different environment?
- If you were moving to Israel, would the Kibbutz collectivist life, Tel Aviv cosmopolitanism or the history of Jerusalem draw you in the most?