



Educator's Guide

Deir Yassin

For a tiny village on the outskirts of Jerusalem, Deir Yassin has certainly made headlines. The events that took place in Deir Yassin in April 1948 are the subject of controversy, both for Israelis and Palestinians. The question is not only what actually happened there, but what impact the events had on Israeli and Palestinian society. This video and the prompts below will help students unpack the mystery surrounding Deir Yassin and encounter the depth and challenges inherent in Israel's story.

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/ezAsaKzQQtE>

Further Reading

1. Daniel Gordis, *Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn*, chapter 7
2. Benny Morris, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGkxvaxAy7s>
3. Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War*, chapter 4
4. Sami Adwan, Dan Bar-On, and Eyal Naveh, *Side by Side: Parallel Histories of Israel-Palestine*
5. Zipporah Porath, *Letters from Jerusalem, 1947-1948*
6. Menachem Begin, *The Revolt: Story of the Irgun*, p. 162-5
7. Ofer Aderet, "Testimonies From the Censored Deir Yassin Massacre"
<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/MAGAZINE-testimonies-from-the-censored-massacre-at-deir-yassin-1.5494094>
8. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/israels-war-of-independence/>
9. <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/were-the-palestinians-expelled/>



Review – Did the students understand the material?

1. Deir Yassin is the name of:
 - a. An Arab village
 - b. An Arab leader
 - c. A city in Jordan
 - d. A Jewish town
2. Jews often call the 1948 War the _____, while Palestinians often call it the _____.
 - a. Nakba, War of Independence
 - b. War of Independence, Nakba
 - c. Deir Yassin, Six Day War
 - d. Six Day War, Deir Yassin
3. Members of which Jewish paramilitaries carried out the attack on Deir Yassin?
 - a. Haganah and Lechi
 - b. Lechi and Irgun
 - c. Irgun and Haganah
 - d. Irgun and Tzahal
4. Why is the event of Deir Yassin so closely linked with the Nakba?
5. What is the controversy surrounding a warning message in Deir Yassin?

Discussion Questions

1. Is it possible for two people to have very different accounts of what happened?
The [Yanny or Laurel dispute](#) helps us understand that it is perhaps quite possible to experience the very same thing differently. How can the [Yanny or Laurel](#) dispute help us understand why many Palestinians and Israelis see the history of Deir Yassin differently (or maybe you think it does not at all)?
2. Some historians claim, and eyewitnesses testify, that the Jewish troops issued a warning to all civilians as they entered the village of Deir Yassin. Others claim that there was no such warning, or that it was only partially heard. Does this



warning change the events at hand? Would knowing that there was definitely a warning vindicate the troops or no? Explain.

- 3.** After the events of Deir Yassin, there was much propaganda about it on both sides. When the Arabs inflated the number of casualties and perpetuated stories of rape and other atrocities, the Haganah did not stop these rumors; the Haganah was invested in showing that the Irgun and Lechi, smaller paramilitaries who had led the attack, were not up to snuff. Did the Haganah act properly in allowing the rumors of Deir Yassin to spread? Were the Haganah leaders short-sighted or necessarily protecting their image?
- 4.** Should what happened at Deir Yassin in 1948 be called a massacre? After watching our video and [this](#) video of famous historian, Benny Morris, debate what the events at Deir Yassin should be called?
- 5.** The events of Deir Yassin are regarded by the Palestinians as the beginning of the Nakba, and by Israelis as a watershed moment in the War of Independence.
 - a. A first-hand Palestinian account reads: “[the troops] blew the door down, entered and started searching the place; they got to the store room, and took us out one by one. They shot the son-in-law, and when one of his daughters screamed, they shot her too. ... We all started screaming and crying, but were told that if we did not stop, they would shoot us all. They then lined us up, shot at us, and left.”
 - b. Irgun leader and later prime minister Menachem Begin wrote: “Not what happened at Deir Yassin, but what was invented about Deir Yassin, helped to carve the way to our decisive victories on the battlefield ... The legend was worth half a dozen battalions to the forces of Israel.”

Are these accounts compatible? How can two people view the same event so completely differently?



Reflection Questions

- 1.** How would you distinguish between history and narrative? Should they be understood as one and the same? When is it important to focus on one's history and when should we focus on narratives?
- 2.** In the famous game between [Princeton and Dartmouth](#), the fans of each team interpreted the genesis of the altercation differently. What does this teach us about human psychology? If something "objectively" happened or did not happen, to what extent does this matter? How can we apply this to the story of Deir Yassin?
- 3.** Ultimately, what matters more: the actual events that took place or the impact that they had on both the Israeli and Palestinian psyche?
- 4.** Yuval Noah Harari in his book, *Sapiens* writes: "Do we focus on the aristocracy, the simple peasants, or the pigs and the crocodiles. History isn't a single narrative, but thousands of alternative narratives. Whenever we choose to tell one, we are also choosing to silence others" (p.100). Whose narratives should be sharing with this story? Are there times that not all narratives should be shared? When thinking about this quote, come up with a **personal** example in which you can think of this being true in your own life. Describe the situation, and how other people saw the same story in a different way.
- 5.** Picture yourself in Palestine (before it was called Israel) in April 1948. If you are Jewish, what are you experiencing? If you are Palestinian, what are you experiencing?
- 6.** War is ugly. Human history is fraught with wars in every corner of the world, and war rages in many parts of the world today. Most atrocities will never be known to most people, even today in the digital age. Israel [prides itself](#) on having a strong code of ethics and an extremely moral IDF. Is Israel held (or does it hold itself) to too high a standard? Is there a reason people remember this one event -



is it an outlier in Israel's history? Today, should Israel hold itself to this standard or be ok with conflict sometimes having ugly consequences?