



Educator's Guide

David Ben-Gurion

David Ben-Gurion is probably the most well-known Israeli leader in the country's history. Yet how much do your students know about this multi-faceted personality? This video goes through 10 important aspects of Ben-Gurion's life and career to paint a fuller picture of this iconic man of action. Watch this video and use the prompts below to deepen your knowledge of Israel's first prime minister.

Link to video:

<https://unpacked.education/video/david-ben-gurion-israels-first-prime-minister/>

Further Reading

1. Anita Shapira, *Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel*
2. Shimon Peres, *Ben-Gurion: A Political Life*
3. Unpacked for Educators,
<https://unpacked.education/video/prime-ministers-the-clash-of-ben-gurion-begin/>
4. David Hulme, "David Ben-Gurion: For the Love of Zion"
<https://www.vision.org/biography-david-ben-gurion-500>
5. Noam Weissman, "What Can We Learn From the Altalena?"
https://jewishjournal.com/cover_story/235375/can-learn-altalena/
6. Homer Bigart, "Ben-Gurion, Symbol of the Tough State of Israel, Achieved a Lifelong Dream"
<https://www.nytimes.com/1973/12/02/archives/bengurion-symbol-of-the-tough-state-of-israel-achieved-a-lifelong.html>



Review – Did the students understand the material?

- 1.** What was David Ben-Gurion’s given name?
- 2.** Which pre-state military group did Ben-Gurion lead?
 - a.** Haganah
 - b.** Irgun
 - c.** Lechi
 - d.** Tzahal
- 3.** Why did Ben-Gurion institute mandatory army service?
- 4.** True or false? Ben-Gurion opposed accepting German Holocaust reparations.
- 5.** What area of Israel did Ben-Gurion love the most?
 - a.** Jerusalem
 - b.** The Golan
 - c.** The Negev
 - d.** Haifa

Discussion Questions

- 1.** Imagine living in pre-state Palestine and you were asked to join Lechi, Irgun or Hagana. Watch [this video](#) and think about Ben Gurion’s line, “We shall fight Hitler as if there is no White Paper and we shall fight the White Paper as if there were no war.”
- 2.** Whose work is more vital in achieving a goal: a visionary or an activist? Though Theodor Herzl and David Ben-Gurion were some of both, in slightly simplistic terms it can be said that regarding the establishment of the State of Israel, Herzl was the visionary and Ben-Gurion the one to put the dream into action. Is one more likely to bring results? Are both necessary? Can a person be one and the same?



- 3.** Ben-Gurion was faced with the difficult question of whether to accept German Holocaust reparations. Menachem Begin was vehemently opposed to accepting money from the Germans, which he believed would make it seem like they could “make up” for what they had done by simply paying Israel. Begin [said](#), “There will not be negotiations with Germany, for this, we are willing to give our lives. It is better to die than transgress this. There is no sacrifice that we won’t make to suppress this initiative. This will be a war of life and death. Today, I shall give the order: Blood!” Ben-Gurion, however, decided to accept the funds, saying, “I don’t want to run after a German and spit in his face. I don’t want to run after anybody. I want to sit here and build here.” Who do you side with on this issue and why?
- 4.** After learning about “Plan Dalet” from this video, debate whether or not you think Ben Gurion’s decision was ethical or not. What are the factors you take into consideration when thinking about this?
- 5.** Ben-Gurion expected American Jews to pick up and move to Israel upon the establishment of the Jewish State and was very upset when most did not. Why do you think most of the American Jewish community did not move to Israel in 1948? Was Ben-Gurion justified in being unhappy about this?
- 6.** Divide your students into groups or pairs and assign them each another biography episode from the History of Israel: Explained series: [Theodor Herzl](#), [Golda Meir](#), [Shimon Peres](#), [Moshe Dayan](#), [Yitzhak Rabin](#), [Eli Cohen](#). Have them create a profile of the Israeli leader, even play the part, and present this person richly to the class.

Reflection Questions

- 1.** David Ben-Gurion wrote in his diary in 1951: “There was nothing that the Jewish people yearned for more over hundreds of years than a Jewish state.” Yet over 70 years later, many of us have become desensitized to this and do not have the gratitude we ought to have for the Jewish state. What are some ways we can proactively feel that gratitude?



- 2.** The famous Silicon Valley venture capitalist Guy Kawasaki said: “Ideas are easy. Implementation is hard.” How would you apply this statement to Ben Gurion’s life? Does this statement about life resonate with you?
- 3.** Based on the aspects of Ben-Gurion’s life mentioned in the video, what kind of leader do you think he was? What quality of his do you most admire?
- 4.** Ben-Gurion was the one to announce the establishment of the State of Israel, with much of the Jewish world listening along. Watch the [video](#) of the moment and think: What did that moment mean to Ben-Gurion and to Jews around the world? What might it have been like to be the very first prime minister of a Jewish state?
- 5.** Ben-Gurion did not consider himself a religiously observant man, yet his dedication to the Jewish People was extreme. What is the relationship between the Jewish religion and the Jewish people? Can one be committed to one and not the other? Do you identify more with Judaism as a religion or a nation, or both?