



Key Events in Israel's History

Topic:

History of Israel

Grade Level(s)

Middle School and High School

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will:

- Crowdfsource their knowledge in order to create a baseline of common knowledge about Israel
- Develop familiarity with milestone dates in Israel's history
- Engage with contemporary Israel

Materials needed

- Copies of *What Do We Know About Israel?* handout — 1 per student
- Internet access for research
- A collection of reference books on Israeli history

Background for Teachers

As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of Israel's establishment, it can be interesting, fun, and exciting to focus on the present-day country. After all, many of the students have experienced it firsthand; and others have family members who have shared stories.

But it can be challenging to think about the Israel of today (and even harder to look into the future) without familiarity with the events that led to the present day. This lesson is designed to help introduce Israel's history to learners in a fast, interactive way that can be tailored for different ages that span middle school and high school, and can fill an hour or several lessons.

The focus here is on 25 milestone dates in Israel's history; feel free to substitute different milestones for some of those in this lesson or to add additional dates to the activity!

Notes

Before getting started, keep a couple of points in mind:

1. The focus is on Israel's history! While there are many points of overlap between the study of Israel and Jewish history, notice that many dates and details that may fit better in a broader Jewish studies curriculum have been left out.
2. This list is not exhaustive, and there are literally hundreds of dates that could be used in addition to, or instead of, the ones proposed. Fee free to add milestone events that matter personally or open the discussion and let your students propose dates to include.



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Background

It would be folly to suggest that students can become conversant with Israel's history in one, two, or even 10 lessons, so set sights accordingly. Hopefully this activity will spark interest and a desire to learn more.

The timeline intentionally begins with several imprecise dates. The goal is not to pretend to know exactly what happened and when, but to establish for students the sheer length of the Jewish People's connection to and with the Land of Israel. Even though nobody can prove that God spoke to Abraham and ordered him to venture to a new land, convey to the class the fact that Jews have passed this story from generation to generation; the *telling* has become a fact, a foundation of the story of the Jews.

For background and context for educators and facilitators, check out:

- [Timeline of Main Events in the History of Israel](#) (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs)
- [Ministry of Foreign Affairs History Timeline](#) (from this page you can click to other history resources)

Description of Activities

Introduction

What do we know about Israel's history? What key dates come to mind? When was it established? When does its history even begin?

These questions and others can start a lively popcorn round of shout-outs from the class as students offer dates and events they know something about. Let it continue for a couple of minutes, perhaps writing things down on the board or butcher paper (or not).

Key points to address: Highlights for the educator

Consider isolating a few key dates and sharing a bit more background about them. If the educator has a personal connection or recollection about one or more of the events, share them! Alternately, if time permits, invite one or more guests to share their own recollections and perceptions of key events. (For instance, perhaps another teacher or a member of the clergy remembers where they were when they heard about the Entebbe rescue, or the Yom Kippur War, or the First Lebanon War; invite them to share their memories with the class.)

Questions the educator can pose to the full group

- Why do these dates matter?
- Is there an event you would like to learn more about?
- What significance, if any, do you place on the ancient milestones? Why?
- As American Jews, do any of these events especially resonate for you?

Small-Group Activity Framing



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When it is time to split into small groups, assign several of the 25 dates to each group. Each group can appoint a sub-group to each date and spend 15-30 minutes conducting online research to learn about the events. (Alternately, if appropriate books are available, provide books for the research.) Challenge each group to come up with a two-minute presentation that will help the class understand the event and its significance.

Presentations may take a variety of forms including:

- Collage (paper and glue)
- Digital Collage (e.g. using [PicCollage](#))
- Spoken-word poetry
- Favorite social media (Note that this could be done in the style of a particular platform and would not necessarily require students to have particular social media accounts.)
- Location shot from a newscast

There probably will not be time to complete the research and planning in one session, so challenge each sub-group to work on it in the days before the next meeting – and make sure everyone knows they will present at the next meeting!

Small Group Activity Questions

Before students begin their small-group research (or while they are immersed in the process), take a few minutes for a quick check-in.

- Does everyone understand what they are to present? And in what form?
- Any questions about how to get information, or when the presentation will take place?

Summing Up and Takeaways

When the presentations are made, encourage students to watch their peers and ask questions. Try to have enough people on hand who can help provide answers.

Consider making some kind of game or contest around the presentations. Maybe a bingo card or voting on Most Entertaining, Most Original, Most Unusual, Most Informative....



Key Events in Israel's History

YEAR	KEY for <i>What Do We Know About Israel?</i>
~2000 BCE	Rough approximation: God spoke to Abraham
~1000 BCE	Rough approximation: King David declared Jerusalem his capital
1882	Beginning of First Aliyah — Young Eastern European Jews return to the Land of Israel.
1903	Kishinev Pogrom — Scores of Jews are massacred in Russia, leading to massive migration of Jews to the US and Palestine.
1917	Balfour Declaration — The British government declares its support for creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine.
1939	British White Paper limits Jewish immigration to Palestine, reducing options for Jews who sought to flee Nazi Germany.
1947	UN votes to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states — the Jews accepted the plan, but the Arabs rejected it.
1948	Israel declares independence — the first Jewish sovereign entity in nearly 2000 years.
1950	Israel enacts Law of Return, granting automatic citizenship to any Jew.
1967	Six Day War — Israel fights a war for survival against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria; in six short days the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) captured territory that tripled the country's size, including the Old City of Jerusalem.
1972	Munich Olympics massacre — Palestinian terrorists killed 11 Israeli athletes in the Olympic Village.
1973	Yom Kippur War — Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, causing heavy casualties but ultimately failing to destroy Israel.
1976	Entebbe rescue mission — The Israeli Air Force rescued hostages held at an airport in Uganda.
1977	Sadat visits Jerusalem — The Egyptian president declares his willingness to strike a peace deal with Israel.
1979	Israel-Egypt peace treaty signed — the first time an Arab country accepted the Jewish state.



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1982	First Lebanon War — in response to relentless cross-border attacks by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the IDF entered Lebanon in an effort to push PLO terror forces 25 miles north of the international border. What was planned as a quick operation lasted 18 years.
1987	First Intifada — Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza stage a spontaneous uprising, literally “shaking off,” to protest continued Israeli rule.
1990	First Gulf War — The US leads a broad Western-Arab coalition to force Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. Iraq tries to draw Israel into the conflict by launching SCUD missile attacks against Israeli targets.
1993	Oslo Accords signed — Israel and the PLO recognize each other and commit to finding a path to peace.
1995	Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin assassinated — A Jewish law student believes he can stop the Oslo Process by killing the prime minister. The country unites in grief and shock.
2000	Collapse of Oslo process — After seven years of start-and-stop negotiations, the Palestinian Authority reverts to terror as a tool to “force” Israel to accept its terms for a deal. Years of bloody confrontation ensue.
2005	Israel unilaterally withdraws from Gaza — hoping the move will encourage moves toward peace, Israel leaves Gaza; but Hamas takes control and peace seems further away than ever.
2006	Second Lebanon War — Following continued attacks by Hezbollah, and the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers, Israel launched a war to defeat Hezbollah. Ultimately, the soldiers’ remains were returned and the border remains quiet, although few believe Israel has heard the last of Hezbollah.
2014	Operation Protective Edge — Israel-Hamas war — After Hamas launched thousands of rockets and missiles from Gaza into Israel, the IDF launched a bruising series of air attacks designed to neutralize the threat from Gaza. International criticism focused on the high Palestinian casualty figures and the relatively low Israeli casualties.
2017	The US recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel — President Trump reversed nearly 70 years of US policy by announcing that the US accepts Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and saying the US will move its embassy to the city soon.