

Fashion and Politics Discussion Questions (For educators)

Introduction

Start with some general questions:

- How do you choose your clothes?
- What are some of the factors you consider when buying clothes?
 - (For example: brand, price, style, unique, plain, etc.)
- Who or what influences your choice in clothes?
 - (For example: parents, friends, celebrities, advertisements, etc.)
- Do political leaders also influence how you dress?

Explain that this activity looks at fashion from a historical perspective. It examines two major time periods after the establishment of the State of Israel and two political leaders who heavily influenced Israeli society by focusing on their style of dress and its influence on the citizens of Israel.

NOTE FOR TEACHERS

- Do not mention the names of the leaders at the beginning of the session.
- Keep in mind that although during each time period there were a number of different fashion styles, for this activity we have chosen to focus on the *sabra*-style of Ben-Gurion and the formal, more elegant style of Begin.

Class Activity

Stage One – David Ben-Gurion (1940s–1950s): Sabra clothing

Show students this photograph of David Ben-Gurion on his morning walk in the Negev, 1961. Ask them to describe the photograph. You can use these questions as a guide:

- How is Ben-Gurion dressed compared to those surrounding him?
- Is this how you would expect a prime minister to look? Why?
- Do you know what type of clothes Ben-Gurion is wearing?
- What do these clothes symbolize?

Show students this photograph of Romanian immigrants working at Tarshiha, 1949.

- What are the people doing in the photograph? Describe their expressions.
- What do you think about the clothes of the men, women, and child? Are they similar to Ben-Gurion's fashion style? In what way?
- Does their clothing suit their work? In what way?
- Would you dress like this? How would you respond if everyone around you dressed like this?

Show students this photograph of David Ben-Gurion, Nechemia Argov, and Yitzhak Rafael.

- This photograph was taken at an official event. What message was Ben-Gurion trying to convey via his clothing?
 - (Mention that the khaki clothing was not his personal fashion style. He knew how to dress in a European style with a suit and tie, as you can see in this picture of a meeting with journalists in 1967. However, he chose to wear khaki to serve as a personal example, similar to his decision to live in a modest hut in Kibbutz Sde Boker.)
 - Khaki clothing was manufactured by an Israeli clothing company called ATA.
- Would a prime minister or leader today wear clothes from one particular company to convey political or other values to the nation? Why?
- Do you think that Ben-Gurion's decision suited the time period in which he lived? Why?
- How do you think the different groups of people in Israel reacted to this clothing (new immigrants, city dwellers, Haredim, religious people, kibbutz members, etc.)?
- In light of your answer to the previous question, what do you think about the Ben Gurion's choice of clothes? Should Ben-Gurion and other leaders have dressed differently? Why?

Summary

Ben-Gurion, as the first prime minister of Israel and the leader of the Mapai socialist party, used his clothing to convey a message to the nation. His decision not to wear expensive suits but to dress in simple khaki clothing indicated his desire to be one of the working people. This suited the historical period and strong socialist ideology of the early years of Israel. In addition, Ben-Gurion adopted a unique style that differentiated the wearer from people and leaders in other places around the world. In so doing, he was suggesting that traditional clothing, language, and customs be put aside in favour of a new Israeli *sabra* identity symbolised by simple and practical clothing.

Stage Two – Menachem Begin (1970s – 1980s): Modern clothing and a return to tradition

Explain about the political changes that led to the election results in 1977.

- Which political party ruled in Israel from its foundation until 1977?
- Which party came to power in 1977?
- Who became the prime minister?
- What did this change say about public opinion of the ruling party?

Show students this photograph of Menachem Begin at home, 1958

- How is Menachem Begin's dress style different to Ben-Gurion's?
- Why do you think he dressed this way?

- The two political leaders served in different time periods. Did this influence the way in which they dressed? How?

This photograph was taken immediately after Menachem Begin was elected prime minister.

- Where did he choose to visit? Why?
- What is he wearing? Why?
- Based on what you have learned about him, do you think Ben-Gurion would have done the same thing? Why?
 - (Note: Begin was the first prime minister of Israel to do this.)
- Read [this article](#) about Ben-Gurion and Begin.
- What does the author highlight as some of the main differences between them?
- How is this apparent in the photographs you have seen of the two politicians?

Summary

Menachem Begin, who served as prime minister from 1977 to 1982, was a completely different leader from David Ben-Gurion. Begin was a leader of the “old school”; while he was very connected to the people, he believed that leadership should be formal, thus showing respect to the role and to the people.

Begin was a lawyer by profession and a political liberal, while Ben-Gurion was a socialist who spent many years living on kibbutz. Their different backgrounds also affected their choice of clothing. In addition, Begin came to power towards the end of the 1970s, a time when Israel was drifting away from the socialist ideology and a capitalist economy was developing in Israel.

Photos



Photograph of David Ben-Gurion on his morning walk in the Negev, 1961



Romanian immigrants working at Tarshiha, 1949



Menachem Begin at home, 1958



David Ben-Gurion, Nechemia Argov, and Yitzhak Rafael



Menachem Begin at the Western Wall, 1981