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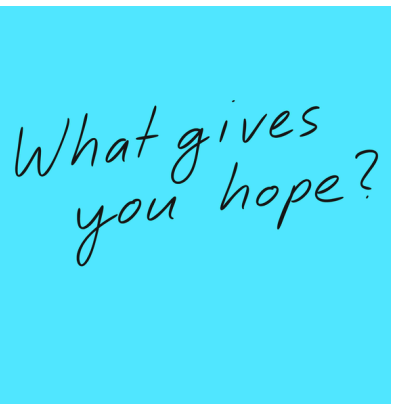
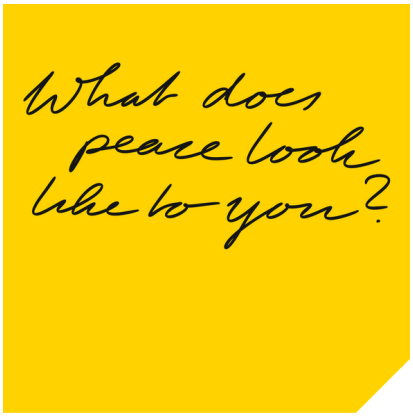
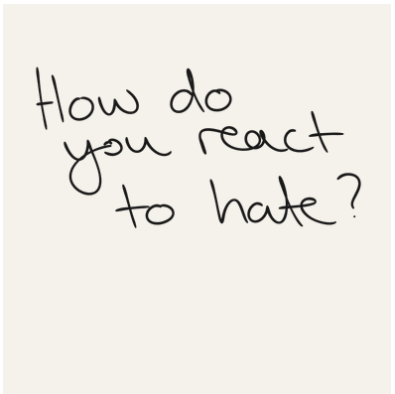
2026

Teacher Guide: Palestinian Nationalism & Zionism









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Introduction

Talking About: Zionism & Palestinian Nationalism

A teacher guide to two concepts central to discussions on Palestine and Israel.

Students hear about these concepts on social media, in the news and at home. Many arrive with particular perspectives, strong feelings and very little shared understanding of what the words actually mean.

This guide brings the two terms together for a reason. Zionism and Palestinian nationalism are both movements for national self-determination in the historical homeland of both peoples. Both peoples have deep historical, cultural and emotional ties to the same land. Both carry stories of exile, loss and survival. And each is often experienced by the other as a threat.

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Introduction cont...

You cannot fully understand one without understanding the other.

The two guides explain:

- Why the terms matter
- A basic definition, and the many forms the movement takes
- What it means to the people who hold it
- What it means to the people who fear/oppose it
- The different views within each movement about land, borders and the other people
- What to avoid when discussing it
- Better ways to talk about it
- A useful test for understanding the fear underneath the argument

This guide does not tell students what to think. Its aim is to help them understand what others hear. Students can disagree strongly about the conflict and still learn to speak about it with precision and respect, without erasing either people or treating a whole community as the enemy.

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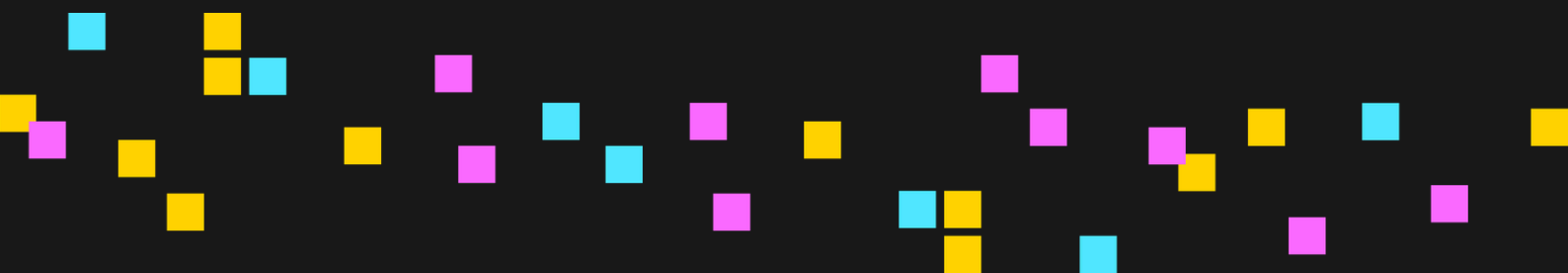
Using this guide in the classroom:

- Teach the two guides together, so neither people's story is heard without the other.
- Agree ground rules before discussion, especially around listening and avoiding generalisations.
- Encourage students to say "many" or "some" rather than "all" when talking about Israelis or Palestinians.
- Remember that some students may have family, faith or personal connections to the region. Let them choose whether to share.
- Use the "useful test" at the end of each guide as a reflection activity: can students name the fear on both sides?
- Consider downloading our student-led-learning resource on Nationalism from the resources section of our website for more classroom material.
- Our guides to avoiding racism and hate speech would also be helpful documents to download and have with you for the discussion.

A better conversation does not require agreement. It requires precision, humility and refusing to erase either people.



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Palestinian Nationalism:

"Palestinian nationalism" isn't just a political label.

For most Palestinians, it means the belief that Palestinian people have the right to self-determination, freedom and safety in their ancestral homeland.

For many Jews and Israelis, it is connected to the rejection of Israel, terror attacks and fear for their safety.

Both of these realities shape how people hear the word.

A basic definition:

Palestinian nationalism is the movement for Palestinian national self-determination, historically focused on ending displacement and occupation, and establishing an independent State of Palestine.

But there are many forms of Palestinian nationalism and many different uses and understandings of the term:

- Some are religious (e.g. could be Muslim or Christian)
- Some are secular
- Some are left-wing
- Some are committed to non-violence
- Some are deeply critical of the Palestinian Authority and/or of Hamas

What it means to most Palestinians:

For most Palestinians, Palestinian nationalism is tied to survival after the Nakba, exile, occupation and statelessness.

It can mean:

- Peoplehood
- Dignity
- Connection to the land
- Return to the land
- The right to a state and a passport of their own

So when people say "there's no such thing as Palestinians" or "Palestinian nationalism is terrorism", many Palestinians hear that as a rejection of their existence, history and identity.

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Palestinian nationalism cont...



What it means to many Jews and Israelis:

For many Jews and Israelis, Palestinian nationalism is not experienced as an abstract idea.

It is associated with:

- Rejection of Israel's right to exist
- Terror attacks, the intifadas and 7 October
- Rockets fired at towns and cities
- Slogans heard as calls for Israel's destruction
- Fear that a Palestinian state would be used to launch attacks on Israel

So when people campaign for Palestinian nationalism without acknowledging Israeli suffering, many Jews hear denial, erasure or justification.

Palestinian nationalism and the land: different views

Palestinian nationalists agree on Palestinian self-determination, but disagree sharply about borders and about Israel.

Many Palestinian nationalists support a two-state solution:

An independent State of Palestine alongside Israel, with both peoples having self-determination, freedom and security. The PLO formally recognised Israel in 1993.

Some Palestinian nationalists reject Israel's existence and claim the whole land. For some this is a religious belief, for others a matter of historic justice. When pursued through violence, as by Hamas (a UK-proscribed terrorist organisation), it goes against international law and creates deep fear for the safety of Israelis.

Some sit somewhere in between, unsure what is possible, or open to other ideas like a confederation or a shared, democratic state with equal rights for all.

So hearing that someone is a Palestinian nationalist doesn't tell you what they think about Israel's right to exist or Israeli safety.

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What to avoid:

- Avoid using "Palestinian" or "pro-Palestinian" as a coded word for "terrorist" or "antisemite"
- Avoid assuming all Palestinian nationalists or all Palestinians support Hamas or violence
- Avoid treating support for a Palestinian state as automatically anti-Israel or antisemitic
- Avoid telling Jews and Israelis what Palestinian nationalism should mean to them
- Avoid telling Palestinians that their identity is invented or that they are not a people
- Avoid claiming that you are speaking on behalf of all Palestinians or Israelis

Better ways to talk about it:

Instead of:
"Palestinian nationalism is terrorism."

Try:
"I object to forms of Palestinian nationalism that deny Israel's right to exist or justify violence against civilians."

Instead of:

"Any criticism of the Palestinian national movement is anti-Palestinian racism."

Try:
"Criticism of Palestinian leaders and movements can be legitimate, but it becomes anti-Palestinian racism when it targets Palestinians as a people, denies Palestinian peoplehood, or uses dehumanising stereotypes."

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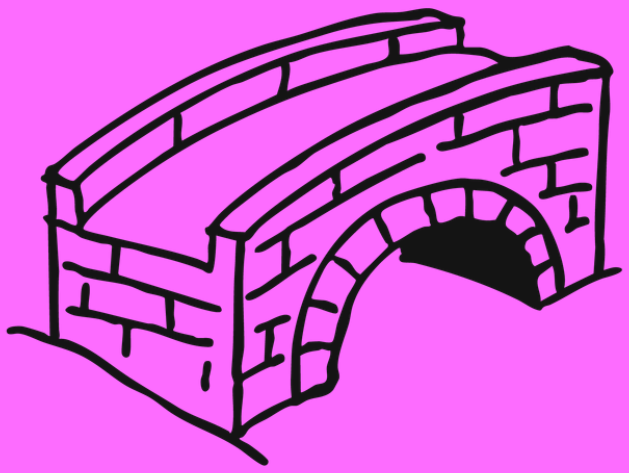
A useful test:

Can you name the fear underneath the argument?

Palestinian fear:
That without self-determination, Palestinians will never be safe and free.

Israeli fear:
That Palestinian self-determination means Jews will never be safe and free.

A better conversation does not require agreement. It requires precision, humility and refusing to demonise any community.



Zionism:

Why this matters:

“Zionism” isn’t just a political label.

For most Jews, it means the belief that Jewish people have the right to self-determination and safety in their ancestral homeland.

For most Palestinians, the word is connected to dispossession, occupation and ongoing loss.

Both of these realities shape how people hear the word.

A basic definition:

Zionism is the movement for Jewish national self-determination, historically focused on the establishment and continuation of the Jewish homeland in Israel.

But there are many forms of Zionism and many different uses and understandings of the term -

- Some are religious (e.g. could be Jewish or Christian)
- Some are secular
- Some are liberal
- Some are nationalist
- Some are deeply critical of the current Israeli government

What it means to most Jews:

For most Jews, Zionism is tied to survival after centuries of persecution, antisemitism, exile and the Holocaust.

It can mean:

- Safety
- Peoplehood
- Refuge
- Cultural Revival
- The right not to be dependent on others for protection

So when people say “Zionism is racism” or “Zionists are evil”, many Jews hear that as a rejection of Jewish safety, history and identity.

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Zionism cont...

What it means to most Palestinians:

For most Palestinians, Zionism is not experienced as an abstract idea.



It is associated with:

- The Nakba
- Displacement
- Military occupation and aggression
- Unequal rights and discrimination
- Restriction of movement
- Loss of land, home and political freedom

So when people celebrate Zionism without acknowledging Palestinian suffering, many Palestinians hear denial, erasure or justification.

Zionism and the land: different views

Zionists agree on Jewish self-determination, but disagree sharply about borders and about Palestinian statehood.

Many Zionists support a two-state solution:

A Jewish state of Israel alongside an independent Palestinian state, with both peoples having self-determination, freedom and security.

Some Zionists believe Israel should govern the whole land, including the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem — and oppose a Palestinian state. For some this is a religious belief, for others a matter of security. It's a belief that goes against a majority consensus of international law and creates fear for the rights of Palestinians.

Some sit somewhere inbetween, unsure what is possible, or open to other ideas like a confederation or a shared, binational state.

So hearing that someone is a Zionist doesn't tell you what they think about Palestinian rights.

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What to avoid:

- Avoid using “Zionist” or “Zio” as an antisemitic coded word for “Jew” or a synonym for “racism”
- Avoid assuming all Zionists or all Jews support every Israeli government action
- Avoid using “anti-Zionist” to automatically mean “antisemitic”
- Avoid telling Palestinians what Zionism should mean to them
- Avoid telling Jews that Zionism should not be part of their identity
- Avoid claiming that you are speaking on behalf of all Israelis or Palestinians.

Better ways to talk about it:

Instead of:
“Zionism is evil.”

Try:
“I object to forms of Zionism that deny Palestinian rights or justify occupation.”

Instead of:
“Anti-Zionism is always antisemitism.

Try:
“Criticism of Zionism can be legitimate, but it becomes antisemitic when it targets Jews, denies Jewish peoplehood, or uses antisemitic tropes.”

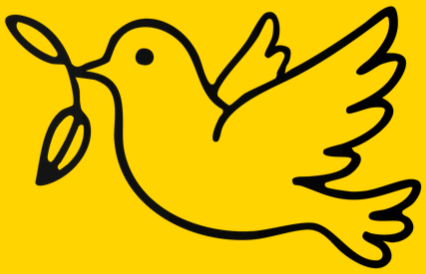
A useful test:

Can you name the fear underneath the argument?

Israeli fear:
That without self-determination, Jews will never be safe and free.

Palestinian fear:
That Jewish self-determination means Palestinians will never be safe and free.

A better conversation does not require agreement. It requires precision, humility and refusing to erase either people.



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Thank you

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