

## Learning outcomes

- ◇ To identify key issues
- ◇ To analyse key concepts
- ◇ To compare/contrast consequences of taking different actions

### Lesson in brief

Students will look at the controversy around the BBC's decision in 2009 not to show a humanitarian appeal for Gaza in order to explore notions of neutrality and fairness

**Materials:** Copies of worksheet, internet access, print-outs from internet if students will not have internet access

### National curriculum

2.1a, 2.1c, 2.1d, 2.2a, 2.2b

## Lesson Plan

### Starter

- ◆ Ask students what neutrality /impartiality mean to them. Write some key words on the board.
- ◆ Ask students if they can think of a situation where it would be a good idea to stand aside and be neutral. Can they think of situations where it would be better to intervene than to do nothing.
- ◆ Show your class the DEC video appeal. It can be found here <http://www.dec.org.uk/item/200>
- ◆ Explain to the class that the BBC refused to show the appeal because it argued that to do so would compromise its impartiality. This decision caused a great controversy. (Please see next page for background)

### Main activity

- ◆ In pairs students will work through the worksheet. They should either have internet access or be provided with print outs of the links referred to.



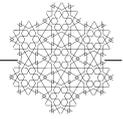
### Plenary

- ◆ Write the following quote on the board and facilitate a class discussion around it. "Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral." --- Paulo Freire

### Homework

- ◆ Write your reaction to the quote:  
"Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral."

You can include situations where you think this quote and the ideas it expresses might be relevant



## Background

After an 18 month blockade of Gaza and three weeks of heavy shelling by Israel in December 2008 - January 2009, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza became overwhelming. Gaza is the most densely populated area in the world. The population of Gaza is 1.5 million and over half of them are children. The borders have been closed for over a year and a half and remained closed during the bombing, so people could not escape. During the bombing several charities and the United Nations accused Israel of war crimes including bombing schools where people had fled the attacks, illegal use of weapons such as white phosphorus and stopping ambulance workers getting to the wounded.

Over 1400 were killed, 412 of them children. Thousands of people have their homes and most were down to their last supplies of food. Electricity shortages meant that the water and sewage systems were on the verge of collapse which leads to many diseases. Most people in Gaza - 1.1 million - are dependent upon aid to survive due to the blockade.

The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) is an umbrella organisation of 13 humanitarian agencies such as Oxfam, Save the Children and Christian Aid. The DEC launches appeals for funds at times of international disasters, such as famine or war. DEC's appeal for Gaza ended up being shown on all terrestrial channels except the BBC, so ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5. It was the first time that that an appeal from the Disasters Emergency Committee had been broadcast without the BBC's support in 46 years. The BBC's decision to refuse to show the appeal was very controversial.

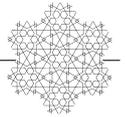
According to the guidelines agreed between the DEC and broadcasters, there are three conditions that must to be met before a nationwide appeal is launched:

- substantial, urgent need in a humanitarian crisis
- evidence that aid agencies can guarantee effective assistance on the ground
- and sufficient "public awareness, and sympathy for" the humanitarian crisis

There have been reports that the BBC had adopted another criteria: that an appeal must not compromise impartiality. When asked about this the BBC said, "Preserving our impartiality is the BBC's main criterion when deciding whether to broadcast an appeal."

The two-minute film did not mention Israel. Instead it offered a description of the humanitarian needs in Gaza. The narrator said: "The children of Gaza are suffering. Many are struggling to survive. Homeless and in need of food and water. Today, this is not about the rights and wrongs of the conflict. These people simply need your help."

The BBC decision was heavily criticised. Thousands of members of the public complained to the BBC. Protestors burned their TV licences outside the BBC's main offices in London. The government also called on the BBC to reconsider and 110 MPs signed an Early Day Motion calling on the BBC to reverse its decision. Several BBC journalists were angry and it was reported that they were told that they could be sacked if they spoke out about the issue.



Read these arguments for and against the BBC decision <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/jan/27/bbc-gaza-appeal-israel1>

◆ Why does Sharif Nashishi think that the BBC’s decision was *not* impartial?

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◆ Why does Geoffrey Alderman think that the appeal itself was not impartial?

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Christian Aid is one of the member organisations of the Disasters Emergency Committee that launched the appeal. What are Christian Aid’s arguments against the charge that it is biased?

<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/letters/letters-christian-aid-1520352.html>

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What does being neutral or impartial mean to you? Write a 1-2 sentence definition.

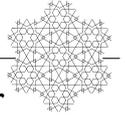
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Philip Hensher, a commentator who writes for the Independent, the Spectator and the Mail on Sunday, wrote a piece in the Independent criticising the BBC. He says: “The trouble is that the BBC's requirement for impartiality has enabled it, yet again, to do nothing. Yet that inactivity does not have a neutral result. It means an appeal is not heard; that some money is not raised; an instance of suffering is not alleviated; that another child dies.[...] Never has impartiality seemed so very far from moral



Philip Hensher thinks the results of an action are important to decide whether it is impartial or not. So he was against the BBC decision because it would lead to more suffering. Did you include the consequences of an action in your definition? Would you now? Why or why not?

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Can you think of an example that could come up in your daily life or politics when standing by would have a neutral result and be a good thing to do?

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Can you think of an example that could come up in your daily life or politics when standing by would **not** have a neutral result and so not be a good thing to do?

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What values would help you decide what to do in a situation where you are asked to take sides. Neutrality? Fairness? Telling the truth? Sticking up for someone who is less powerful or who cannot stick up for themselves?

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Would walking away from a situation also be taking sides?

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