



# Role-play—refugees

## Learning outcomes

- ◇ Students will gain a greater understanding of some of the key issues at stake with regard to Israel-Palestine
- ◇ Students will argue views which are not necessarily their own
- ◇ Students will gain understanding of refugees' attachment to home

## Lesson in brief

A role-play to explore some of the key questions around one of the most central issues regarding Israel-Palestine— the refugees.

## National curriculum

1.1a, 1.2a, 1.2c, 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.2c

**Materials:** photocopies of the role play cards

## Lesson Plan

### Starter

- ◇ Begin the class by reminding/informing students that when Israel was established in 1948, over two thirds of the indigenous Palestinian population fled or were expelled. These people and their descendents are refugees and have not been allowed to return home. Their right to return home, known as the Right of Return is enshrined in international law.

### Activity

- ◇ Split the students into groups of five and give each student a character card. The characters are:
  - a Jewish Israeli citizen moved to Israel from the US
  - a Palestinian refugee living in a refugee camp in Lebanon
  - a Palestinian refugee living in London
  - a Palestinian refugee living in Gaza
  - a Jewish Israeli citizen born in Israel

**N.B**—The religion of the Israeli citizens are noted because Israel conceives of itself as a Jewish state. The non-Jewish citizens of Israel are Palestinians and are in effect second class citizens. They are not represented here, as that would have meant too many characters espousing the Right of Return.

- ◇ The characters will discuss the following questions
  - ◇ Where should the refugees go? Is the Right of Return valid?
  - ◇ Can the Right of Return be given up?
  - ◇ Who is responsible for ensuring that refugees' rights are upheld?
  - ◇ Should the refugees get compensation? If so, who from?
  - ◇ What would peace and justice look like to you?

### Plenary

- ◇ Bring the class together for a group discussion about the questions raised and the students' reactions.

### Homework/follow-up

- ◇ Ask the students to write short answers to the questions the characters discussed from their own point of view.

## Role play

- ◆ Read through your card and think for a few minutes about your character.
- ◆ Words that come up in the cards...
  - Nakba*—means ‘catastrophe’ in Arabic—this is the word Palestinians use to describe what happened to them in 1948.
  - Aliyah*—means ‘going up’ in Hebrew. It refers to Jewish immigration to Israel. According to Israeli law, any Jew in the world has the right to move to Israel and become a citizen.
- ◆ Discuss these questions using your card to help you think of what your character would say and feel in response to what the other characters say.
  - ◇ Where should the refugees go?
  - ◇ Is the Right of Return valid?
  - ◇ Can the Right of Return be given up?
  - ◇ Who is responsible for ensuring that refugees’ rights are respected?
  - ◇ Should the refugees get compensation? If so, who from?
  - ◇ What would peace and justice look like to you?

### Jewish Israeli citizen moved to Israel from the US

- ◆ I made aliyah a few years ago. I am a Jew born and brought up in America, and came here in my early twenties.
- ◆ I love my country. Israel is the only homeland for Jews, and I passionately believe it should stay that way because it is a place where we Jews can be safe and free from persecution.
- ◆ I will not accept the return of the Palestinian refugees, because their return would mean that Israel would cease to be a Jewish state. There are 22 Arab countries - surely the Palestinians can live there, I think.
- ◆ I know that the house I live in belonged to a Palestinian family before the state of Israel was established. But I do not feel it rightfully belongs to them, the Jews are the rightful owners of the land.
- ◆ I cannot believe the people who say that the Palestinians were expelled. I think the Arab leaders encouraged the Palestinian to flee—so how can Israel bear responsibility for the refugees? And I think that the Arab states are still responsible not Israel. I say the Arab states are deliberately maintaining dismal conditions among the refugees in order to use them as a political weapon against Israel.
- ◆ I am not too worried about the Right of Return though. The US supports Israel on this and is committed to Israel being a Jewish state. They wouldn’t let the Palestinians return, so I am pretty confident it will never happen, and the sooner Palestinians accept that the better.



### Palestinian refugee living in a refugee camp in Lebanon

- ◆ I was born and grew up in a refugee camp in Lebanon. 60 years ago my family lived in Palestine. During the Nakba my family fled thinking that they would return when the violence was over.
- ◆ 60 years later, we are still living in the same refugee camp that my grandparents fled to in 1948. Although the tents have long been replaced by concrete buildings, the conditions that we live in are cramped and squalid.
- ◆ I resent living in this undignified way – living in poverty, on handouts from the UN and as foreigners in someone else’s country. I feel that many people here hate us because they blame us for bringing problems to their country.
- ◆ Not I or anyone in my family has even been allowed to visit home. My family is dispersed in different countries and cannot see each other. I even still have family in what is now Israel, but I have not met them. It saddens me that my grandparents died in the camp always dreaming of home and never able to see their home again.
- ◆ I feel the peace-process ignores my fate and the fate of all the refugees and so any solution it proposed would be a solution without justice. I think that we Palestinians should never give up on seeking justice.
- ◆ I would never accept money instead of the Right of Return. I feel that would be a defeat and giving up on our dreams and love for Palestine that are part of our soul.



### Palestinian refugee living in London

- ◆ 60 years ago, my family lived in Palestine. During the Nakba my family fled thinking that they would return when the violence was over. My family were well-off and were able to make it to London.
- ◆ I feel quite disconnected from the Palestinians living in poverty and without almost any rights at all in the West Bank and Gaza and in camps across the Middle East.
- ◆ I think it is ridiculous that people believe there is a Palestinian government in the West Bank and Gaza, when they are under the thumb of the Israelis and most Palestinians do not even live there. Palestinians like me have no say and no-one to represent them
- ◆ I feel the peace-process ignores the fate of refugees and that it treats refugee rights as a negotiation counter. The right to home cannot be a counter, I feel.
- ◆ I know that international law gives me the right to go home and to choose compensation instead of returning. I think it’s right that people should be able to choose between returning and getting compensation.
- ◆ I am settled in London and it is where I want to spend the rest of my life. So even if the Right of Return were granted, I would not go back. But I strongly feel no-one can take my right to return to the family home away from me and other Palestinians, and it should be up to individuals to choose whether or not to exercise their right



### Palestinian refugee living in Gaza

- ◆ I was born in Gaza and grew up under Israeli occupation. We live about 20 miles from the family's original home which is now in Israel but we cannot go there. I think we Palestinians have to accept that we will never go back there. I know that my views are unpopular amongst Palestinians wherever they are.
- ◆ I think we have to give up the Right of Return in exchange for a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank, the part of Palestine Israel occupied in 1967, a fifth of old Palestine. There should be two states one for Israelis and one for Palestinians. Refugees should give up their right to go home and accept to be resettled in a future Palestinian state – and Israel would be a Jewish state.
- ◆ I think it is out of the question that Israel would give up on being a Jewish state. It would never allow the refugees back, so a peace settlement is only possible if Palestinians give up on this unrealistic dream to go home. It is the only realistic way out of the conflict.
- ◆ Of course Israel is responsible for expelling the refugees from their homes. But it is unrealistic to expect Israel to take responsibility and we have to accept that.
- ◆ Insisting on the Right of Return has become an obstacle to any peace plan because neither Israel nor the international community would guarantee the of the refugees and we do not have powerful friends.
- ◆ We Palestinians need a state. The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is strangling us. We will only achieve a state if we give up some of our rights. It is a necessary sacrifice.



### Jewish Israeli citizen born in Israel

- ◆ I am an Israeli born in Israel. When I was growing up I accepted the idea that my country rightfully belonged to the Jews, but that changed. I know that the views I hold now are unpopular in Israel. I work with Palestinians and Israelis like myself to try to re-educate Israeli society.
- ◆ Most Jewish Israelis live in ignorance or even denial of the disaster that took place in 1948, the Nakba. One of the things that we do is organise tours to Palestinian villages destroyed in 1948 and we put up signs with their original Arabic names. We do this because some Palestinian places have been completely destroyed and others have been changed and given Hebrew names, so the history of the Palestinians is being erased.
- ◆ The Nakba is the disaster of the Palestinian people. But it is not the story of another people that took place somewhere else — I believe it is also our story, because it is our history and we are still living with the privileges of being the 'winners.'
- ◆ I feel it is important for Israeli society to learn about the Nakba. I think learning about the Nakba is an important first step but it is not enough to learn without taking responsibility.
- ◆ We should acknowledge the tragedy that took place, and take responsibility for our part in it. It would mean accepting the Right of Return for the refugees who were expelled. I think this is the only way out of the struggle and the first step to peace.
- ◆ I know that allowing the Right of Return means that Israel would no longer be a Jewish state, but I believe that in this new state life would be better for both Palestinians and Israelis as they would be equals.

