

## ***Competing Narratives: The Land Speaks Arabic (61 minutes) and In Search of Peace Part One: 1948-1967 (show 48 of the 112 minutes)***

To give students a sense of the early history of the conflict and to illustrate the idea of competing narratives, show students the two movies *The Land Speaks Arabic* (61 minutes, 2007) and the first 48 minutes of *In Search of Peace Part One: 1948-1967* (112 minutes). The first movie tells about the conflict from the Palestinian perspective; the second tells about the conflict from the (Zionist) Israeli perspective.

### **Introducing the Movies and the Concept of Competing Narratives**

A fun way to introduce this concept is to arrange for another teacher to visit your classroom for a moment while you are out of the room. The visitor should say several things (and perhaps wear several odd items of clothing) and then leave and you can return to the room. Have the students report to you exactly what was said and what the teacher looked like. See if you can elicit conflicting details from the students. For example, did the visitor say “*Please* say hello to your teacher” or did the visitor just say “Say hello to your teacher”? Did s/he look mean or just serious? Did the visitor have a striped red and black tie or a checkered red and blue tie? (Alternatively, you can show a picture for 10 seconds and then ask students to recall details about the picture.)

Tell students that this visit shows them how easily the same event can be remembered differently. History is understood as a series of remembered events (narratives). But *who* remembers it determines *how* it will be remembered. Narratives differ. Traditionally, victors and the upper classes tell the histories that are passed on to future generations; they have the power/money/leisure to commission the writing of history. But other groups may remember the same events differently. This is known as “competing narratives.”

Point out that even with competing narratives, some facts can be determined to be true or false (was the tie, in actual fact, blue or black or another color?; what are ways that students could check that fact?). Some narratives may contain more true facts than others; but some competing narratives may simply emphasize different facts. Have students ever experienced competing narratives themselves? Does their sibling remember an argument differently, for example? What are some competing narratives surrounding the European settlement of North America (Manifest Destiny v. Genocide) or the issues of immigration (they take our jobs v. they are the backbone of our country)?

Israelis and Palestinians have competing narratives about what happened in Israel/Palestine. Explain that the students will learn of the competing narratives in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict by watching two movies. Each movie gives a different perspective on the same events/times. Students can also get a sense of what “facts” might be true or false from looking at whether there is any proof for a particular part of the narrative.

Below is a teacher chart about the movie with many details filled in, as well as a blank template for students. Students will not be able to fill in all the details that are on the teacher chart; these details are to help the teacher discuss the movies afterwards with the students. After each movie, have students compare their charts with each other in groups of three or four, filling in details. Then their group can write a summary of the main narrative (the last row) together.

After showing both movies and filling in the chart, each group can present one row of information to the class (Group 1 can present the details they wrote down for “Who are the Palestinians”, etc.). Finally, student groups can all present their summaries of the main points of the competing narratives. Perhaps the teacher can write a class summary on the board, garnered from all the groups’ input. Discussion questions are included below.

## Teacher Comparison Chart

<b>Issue/Date</b>	<b><i>The Land Speaks Arabic</i> Palestinian perspective</b>	<b><i>In Search of Peace</i> Israeli perspective</b>
Who are the Palestinians?	This film begins here. Inhabitants for many years, large villages, cultivated land; grew wheat, barley, raised sheep; lived on land for centuries, footage of villages, peasants/farmers on the land; a populated country; Christians, Jews, and Muslims; lived in cities like Jerusalem, educated, lived together peacefully with different religions, welcomed Jews, but did not welcome a nation-state for Jews	<p>Arabs with 700 year presence on land. Grand Mufti of Jerusalem was enthusiastic supporter of Hitler. Had other Arab states to go to; Jews did not.</p> <p>They abandoned their property during the war of independence that formed Israel. The Israeli government took it over, though some Israelis objected. Over 700,000 displaced.</p> <p>In Israel, they do not feel treated like equal citizens, they do not celebrate Israel's independence, it was a disaster for them. They do not feel like citizens.</p> <p>The movie calls them "Israeli Arabs".</p>

<b>Issue/Date</b>	<b><i>The Land Speaks Arabic</i> Palestinian perspective</b>	<b><i>In Search of Peace</i> Israeli perspective</b>
<p>Who are the Israelis? What is Zionism?</p>	<p>settlers from Europe, a colonial movement to make a state for Jews, racist, supremacist; asked Turkey for a nation-state, then asked Britain, which resulted in Balfour Declaration; wanted transfer of Jews to Palestine and transfer the Arabs out; Jews were mainly middle-class (before WW II) from Europe, less than 25% of people in Jerusalem were Jews; did not view Palestinians as having rights to the land; felt right to build national home from promise of God to Abraham; started by secular Jews, most religious Jews were against Zionism; Zionists were secular nationalists; Arab Jews were not Zionists, they were friends with Muslim and Christian Palestinians; problems started later with immigration of Jews from Europe; Zionism used religion to justify establishing Israel; myth that they would build a shining city on swamps;</p> <p>Names: Herzl, Ben Gurion</p> <p>Zionist settlements were also military settlements, most people on them trained as soldiers</p>	<p>Jews had controlled Jerusalem in 70 AD. Historic homeland. Continuous Jewish presence for 3500 years. Chaim Weizmann, leader of Zionists</p>

<b>Issue/Date</b>	<b><i>The Land Speaks Arabic</i> Palestinian perspective</b>	<b><i>In Search of Peace</i> Israeli perspective</b>
Transfer	started in beginning of Zionist project, Herzl, many documents to prove this in Israeli archives, Labor Zionism believed in a gradual increase of immigration until they were majority; Jewish National Fund/Jewish Agency recorded the village details	not mentioned
Actions in 1900s & 1920s & population	Palestinian demonstrations, appeals, delegations to Europe, population before WWI: only 5-10% Jews; more Jewish immigrants arriving every month, announced in Pal. newspapers as dangerous	not mentioned

<b>Issue/Date</b>	<b><i>The Land Speaks Arabic</i> Palestinian perspective</b>	<b><i>In Search of Peace</i> Israeli perspective</b>
1930s	<p>Main demographic change occurred in late 20s and early 30s under British rule; Palestinians feel threat, join resistance to Jews and Government of Britain, ambushes, fired at cars and buses, guns bought in Lebanon and Syria, 1 rifle for every 4 families or people, fought Jewish auxiliary/guards, Jews called on Government who had tanks, Pal. rebels were put on trial and faced death or prison, Zionist public policy is coexistence, Zionist private policy is to remove Palestinians, Jewish militias, Palestinian Rebellion 1936 -- strikes and rebellions in countryside, British bomb villages, British Peel Commission, Jewish leaders propose organized Transfer to Peel Commission as way to deal with the problems; British crushed Palestinian Rebellion by 1939, crushed leaders, disarmed all Palestinians, severe sentences, tight surveillance, punished for even having a knife, but meanwhile Jews were arming themselves, which is why Zionists later won, by late 1930s Zionist militia throw bombs in markets &amp; urban centers, smuggle arms, assassinate, Jabotinsky, Irgun Gang, Jewish terrorism, Zionist underground, British installations also targetted by Zionist militias ex. King David Hotel; Semiramis Hotel, trains; forged money</p>	not mentioned

<b>Issue/Date</b>	<b><i>The Land Speaks Arabic</i> Palestinian perspective</b>	<b><i>In Search of Peace</i> Israeli perspective</b>
1945-1949	<p>Deir Yassin massacre, 1948: Transfer becomes a military tactic, Plan Dalit talks about clearing out villages and towns, only 3 1/2 % of land is bought by Jewish Agency, Jewish community was almost totally in military, had more soldiers than all the countries around it, Pal. villagers had no arms, at mercy of Hagana (Zionist army), Pal. tried to buy arms, but had little money, Zionists bombed and shot them, Pal. had the choice of leaving or dying. Even villages that did not resist were bombed, shot at people who were fleeing, planes bombed fleeing inhabitants, they had been disarmed by the British in the 1930s, people hid in caves, bombed villages for days, Pal. walked for miles, Zionists destroyed everything, machine-gunned inhabitants, massacres, killed groups, killed people sleeping, Jewish leaders swore they hadn't hurt the native population</p>	<p>This film begins here after showing the 1993 Oslo handshake which was supposed by many to be the start of peace. The film links 1948 Jewish soldiers receiving key to Jerusalem which had not been in Jewish hands since 70 AD; 1947 UN partition plan of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, celebrations, Ben Gurion, chair of Jewish Agency, predicts fighting, Jews of Palestine needed weapons to compete with the Arab armies, American Jews helped raised money, Golda Meir raised \$50 million from US, violence began, Jewish Kfar Etzion village massacred, May 13, 1948 by Arab Legion soldiers, only 4 survived, total 148 killed, Arabs claimed this as retribution for Deir Yassin in April 1948 when radical Jewish groups Irgun and Stern Gangs had killed 245, denounced by Jewish Agency and Chief Rabbi; secret mtg w/ King of Jordan who had promised not to attack, waited 2000 years for a state, promises to accept UN borders if there is no war, King believes that Jews' knowledge and initiative are needed, King assassinated, Arab countries close borders, Jews living there worried and sent children away to Israel, May 14, 1948, British sail away and Israel inaugurated, Declaration of Independence, US officially recognizes Israel, Egyptian air force bombs Tel Aviv, May 15 fighting broke out: Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, (Trans) Jordan, Egypt; War of Independence, Israel had only 4 airplanes, then more arrived illegally from Am. volunteers, 5000 volunteers from around the world arrived to help fight, bombed Cairo, women also fought, Palmach (kibbutz fighting force) was egalitarian fighting force. (Cont'd in next box)</p>

<b>Issue/Date</b>	<b><i>The Land Speaks Arabic</i> Palestinian perspective</b>	<b><i>In Search of Peace</i> Israeli perspective</b>
1945-49 (cont'd)	see above	<p>Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter (important religious places) destroyed by the Arab Legion and forced to surrender, lost spiritual center of state when they lost Old City/East Jerusalem, Egyptian army only 25 miles from Tel Aviv, supplies running out, slaughter of 70 doctors and nurses, kibbutz in danger, spirited children away, built new "Burma" road to Jerusalem, volunteering Am. colonel Mickey Marcus mistaken as intruder &amp; killed, Hassidic rabbi stayed &amp; died in Jer., June 11, 1948: first of several UN-sponsored truces, used to resupply Jerusalem, Ben Gurion tries to unite Haganah (including Palmach) with Irgun Gang (led by Begin) &amp; Stern Gang (led by Shamir) to create Israel Defense Force, but Irgun tried to land ship with weapons, Palmach (led by Allon) overcomes Irgun, Sept. 2, 1948: "5:1 Arab advantage over it", Isr. holds on to territory and gains more, Nov. 1948: Arabs agree to ceasefires and armistice, Jerusalem divided, by 1949 Israel keeps Negev Desert but withdraws from much of Egypt's Sinai, keeps Eilat and Gulf of Aqaba from Jordan. War of Independence took one year and seven months. 6000 (1% of pop.) Israelis dead. No peace treaties. No Arab nations willing to accept concept of Jewish state. Hundreds of thousands of "Arabs who fled their homes" were refugees. May 11, 1948: 2/3 majority vote Israel into UN, elect Ben Gurion. Knesset is first Jewish parliament in sovereign Jewish state. (cont'd)</p>

<b>Issue/Date</b>	<b><i>The Land Speaks Arabic</i> Palestinian perspective</b>	<b><i>In Search of Peace</i> Israeli perspective</b>
1945-1949 (cont'd)	see above	Early years of Israeli state, including culture, how Palestinians (called Israeli Arabs) feel the War of Independence was a disaster for them, feel unequally treated, land taken away by Israeli government, Land Acquisition Law, Israeli PM says they'll trade land for a peace treaty, Israel refuses to allow refugees to return, refugees also not treated well in Arab countries, hundreds of thousands of Jews forced to flee Arab countries to Israel, smuggled Jews to Israel, safe haven for any Jew in the world was passed as a law in 1950, 1947-1951: 680,000 Jews arrived in Israel, doubling pop. (120,000 were Holocaust survivors, 125,000 Iraqi Jews), anti-Jewish massacres in Yemen -- evacuated to Israel
Last thoughts of movie	Europeans took the country. Israeli rabbi in 1950's called it "robbery". Elderly Palestinians have fond memories of better times.	The film continues all the way to 1967 (but you will not show it for this lesson). The section immediately following 1949 describes the new culture of Israel, how Israeli Arabs lost their homes, how Jews from all over the Arab world immigrated to Israel

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<p>Summary: The main points of each narrative</p>	<p>Palestinians lived in Palestine peacefully for centuries, with Jews, Christians, and Muslims living together. Then a Jewish settler movement from Europe (Zionism) began with the help of British mandate authorities. Zionism was unfair because it aimed to take land and rights away from Palestinians. After the Palestinian Rebellion of 1936-1939, Palestinian resistance was broken by the British. Well-armed Zionist militias carried out the Transfer of Palestinians, which had been a private policy for decades but became public during the War of 1947-49. Palestinians left their homes because their other choice was death. They want to return.</p>	<p>The Jews had a continuous presence in Palestine for 3500 years. They needed one sovereign state for Jews; by contrast, the Arabs there had other countries that were Arab. The UN voted to give the Jews a state in 1947. The Jews were outnumbered and outgunned but fought bravely and prevailed in the War of Independence of 1948. American money and volunteers were very helpful. Finally, Jews have a state and they can help Jews who are persecuted in other lands.</p>

### **Other notes on *In Search of Peace*:**

Teachers can also use the following notes to show their students other historical moments and the Israeli perspective on the wars of 1956 and 1967

### **Creation of Israel -- War of Independence**

Minute 1: The 1993 Oslo handshake with Arafat and Rabin -- Rabin's speech,

Minute 1- 48 : Creation of State of Israel

Minute 49-53 : Austerity and immigration in the first years after 1948, self-sufficient farming communities, Ashkenazi (European) v. Sephardi (Eastern) Jews tensions, religious v. secular tensions, Ben Gurion maintains status quo, German war reparations controversy, Palestinian terrorism, Moshe Dayan,

### **War of 1956**

Minute 54-59: 1956 secret negotiations between Egypt and Israel, Egypt/Nasser wants Negev, Soviet arms to Egypt, Isr. negotiates with France for arms, Egypt nationalizes Suez canal, taken as act of war because it stopped Israeli ships from going from Mediterranean through canal to Eilat, French-British land troops to take canal back, Israeli army pushes into Egypt, capturing Soviet arms and finding copies of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, British -French attack canal, Soviets warn Israel that it has missiles, worried that this conflict could involve the Soviets, the US demands withdrawal of British and French forces, US threatens sanctions on Israel, Israel agrees to pull back forces if Egypt will allow Isr. ships through and not use Gaza to stage attacks, 172 Israelis died, 2000 Egyptians died.

### **Interludes**

Minute 59- 1:08: agriculture and irrigation, Jordan Valley Project, the Negev bloomed, Golda Meir's diplomacy with Africa, Shula Cohen sentenced to life in Lebanon & tortured, 1960: Eichmann found by Mossad in Argentina & put on trial in Israel, criticized for violating Argentina's sovereignty, majority of Israelis not Holocaust victims, Eichmann executed, only time that death penalty used in Israel

Minute 1:07 --1:14: 1963 Egypt, Syria, Iraq sign unity agreement and proclaim goal of liberating Palestine, Jordan wanted peace, secret dialogue with Israel, Soviet bloc & Arab nations make up one side of Cold War v. Israel and US on the other side, US sends arms to Israel for 1st time, Meir uses fear of diaspora and Holocaust as arguments for more support from Pres. Kennedy, culture blossoms in theater and orchestra, literature, opera, Placido Domingo, revived Hebrew language,

### **1967 War**

Minute 1:14 -- 1:45 (end except for credits) : military administration over Israeli Arabs, ongoing attacks on Jews, opposed by leftist Jews, Palestinians memories, "Palestinian Arabs" begins to be used as a phrase in the movie, rise of Pal. nationalist movement due to tensions & sense of abandonment by Arab world, Yasser Arafat biography, student union president in Egypt & involved in Muslim Brotherhood, in Kuwait formed 1957 Fatah (Pal. National Liberation Movement) for direct military

action to regain Pal. 1964 conference in E. Jer. created PLO, Covenant language, military operations by Fatah, more attacks by other groups, cycle of violence, Syrian attack from Golan Heights on Israeli kibbutz in April 1967, Israeli jets shot down Syria's planes, Syrians demand that Egypt join in, Egypt refuses saying it will wait for an attack on Syria, Syria reported Israel massed on Syrian border, Egypt then moved into Sinai -- supposed to be demilitarized -- Cairo radio warned of destruction of Israel, May 15 Israel's independence parade held without usual brigades, Egypt suspects soldiers are on Syrian border, Egypt orders removal of UN soldiers from Sinai, UN Sec. Gen. calls for withdrawal of troops, Israeli gov't ordered partial mobilization, May 22: Nasser closes Straits of Tiran to Israeli boats, Israeli ministers consult with Brit, France, US, and old leaders, Nasser makes another speech pointing to Pal. as an issue, UN members do not volunteer to join force to end Nasser's blockade, Moshe Dayan appointed as Defense Minister, June 1 PM Eshkol brings Begin into a national unity govt, all reserves mobilized, air raid shelters, nation prepares for war, fear of another holocaust, June 4: Dayan says preemptive strike necessary, June 5: Israeli planes destroyed Egyptian planes in 7 minutes. 300/340 planes demolished, also crippled airports, communications, began attack on ground in Sinai, took Gaza, Cairo radio lies and announces that Egypt had destroyed Israeli army, Syria bombs Israeli towns, Israel forces destroy Syrian air capacity (2/3 of its fleet), Jordan's King Hussein is told by Israel to stay out of war, but Jordan believes Nasser's news and attacks Israel across the 1948 armistice lines, Jordan attacked W. Jerusalem, June 7: Israel takes E. Jerusalem and rest of West Bank, decimating Jordanian army; Israeli army gets to Suez Canal and opens it to Israeli shipping, Is. also takes Golan Heights from Syria, "For the 1st time in 2000 years, the Old City was in Jewish hands", prayer at Western Wall/Temple Mount, promise to protect the holy sites of all faiths, many secular soldiers prayed for first time, Shula Cohen freed in prisoner exchange, Dayan prays for peace, Ehud Olmert, many toured the area in the following days, reunification of Jerusalem & end of war; 759 Israelis killed, 30,000 Arabs killed, enlarged Israel by 3 times, millions of Arabs occupied, Israel's flag flying proudly, ...

**Here are some discussion questions to use with your class after they have watched the movies: (These questions are duplicated below for students)**

How do the narratives differ?

What does each narrative call themselves and the other people? (The Israeli narrative does not refer to the indigenous people as Palestinians, but always calls them Arabs, for instance, why do you think so?)

What does each narrative emphasize? How does the title of each movie highlight its narrative?

What does each narrative leave out?

--Why do you think that the Israeli narrative omits any mention of the 1920s or 1930s in Palestine or Transfer? Why do you think that it omits mentioning the Holocaust until after Israel has won its war? (Teacher note: probably because Zionism originated well before the Holocaust; Zionism began with Herzl in the late 1800s; it certainly arose out of the persecution of Jews in Europe, but it preceded the Holocaust by many years.)

--Why do you think that the Palestinian narrative does not mention the UN Partition plan but does mention the Balfour Declaration? (Teacher note: the Palestinians view both as unfair and usually criticize both; perhaps because Palestinians so often look to the UN as the source of international law and upholding Palestinian human rights, the documentary makers decided not to mention a UN proposal that did not support Palestinians.) Why doesn't the Palestinian narrative discuss the mistreatment of Jews in Arab countries?

What were places where you thought one side or the other had more accurate facts or where you thought that the narratives were in direct conflict with each other?

-For example, the Palestinian narrative says that Zionist leaders said they had not harmed any civilians; whereas the Israeli narrative says that some Zionist and religious leaders criticized the Deir Yassin massacre-- is this reconcilable?

-Also, each side claimed that they were outnumbered by the other side. How would students go about checking these facts to determine their accuracy? Hint: a recent generation of Israeli historians (the "new historians like Simha Flapan, Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé) have access to more information in Israeli archives and have been debunking many of the myths told about the founding of Israel, including the one that Israel was outnumbered. Meanwhile, Palestinian and other historians have also presented very accurate and well-documented facts and figures in various books.

-Why does the Israeli film mention a massacre by Zionist extremists in 1948 (Deir Yassin) but not market bombs and the blowing up of the King David Hotel in 1946?

-Are there times when both narratives can be right? wrong? What are the difficulties in establishing historical fact?

Palestinians call the war of 1947-49 the Catastrophe/Nakba, while Israelis call the war of 1948 the War of Independence -- explain. And why do you think each narrative gives different dates?

How did you feel about each movie?

What questions do you still have?

**Competing Narratives: Israeli and Palestinian**

Name:

<b>Issue/Date</b>	<b><i>The Land Speaks Arabic</i> Palestinian perspective</b>	<b><i>In Search of Peace</i> Israeli perspective</b>
Who are the Palestinians?		
Who are the Israelis? What is Zionism?		
Transfer		

<b>Issue/Date</b>	<b><i>The Land Speaks Arabic</i> Palestinian perspective</b>	<b><i>In Search of Peace</i> Israeli perspective</b>
Actions in 1900s & 1920s & Population		
1930s		
1945-49		
Last thoughts of movie		

<b>Issue/Date</b>	<b><i>The Land Speaks Arabic</i> Palestinian perspective</b>	<b><i>In Search of Peace</i> Israeli perspective</b>
Summary: The main points of each narrative		

## Competing Narratives: Questions for Discussion

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