

Understanding the Nakba - History, Displacement, and Ongoing Realities

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Format: Self-paced, asynchronous

Target Audience: Learners aged 13-18

Estimated Duration: 95-110 minutes

Module Description: This module explores the history of the Nakba, the mass displacement of Palestinians beginning in 1948 and its continuing impacts today. Learners will examine Palestinian life before Zionist settlement, British colonial involvement in Palestine, the United Nations Partition Plan, the Nakba, refugee experiences, occupation, settlements, and contemporary realities.

Learners will explore:

- Palestinian society before 1948
- Indigenous Palestinian life and culture
- The emergence of political Zionism
- British colonialism in Palestine
- The Sykes-Picot Agreement
- The Balfour Declaration
- The United Nations Partition Plan
- The Nakba and mass displacement
- Palestinian refugees and the right of return
- Israeli occupation and settlement expansion
- The Apartheid Wall
- Historical narratives and contemporary realities

Activities include journal prompts, knowledge checks, reflective exercises, and optional extension projects.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- Describe Palestinian society before 1948
- Explain the emergence and goals of political Zionism
- Analyze the role of British colonialism in Palestine
- Explain the significance of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and Balfour Declaration
- Describe the events of the Nakba and its consequences
- Explain the concept of displacement and refugeehood
- Analyze the continuing effects of occupation and settlement expansion
- Explain the significance of the right of return
- Reflect on the relationship between historical knowledge, justice, and human rights
- Define and use key historical and political terms accurately

Content Advisory Facilitators should be prepared for the possibility that learners may experience emotional reactions when engaging with the content. These reactions may arise from personal, family, or community experiences related to racism, discrimination, violence, or displacement.

Given the complexity and sensitivity of the topics, it is essential to create a learning environment where all participants feel safe, respected, and able to engage thoughtfully.

The goal of discussion is not to force agreement, but to support thoughtful learning, respectful dialogue, and critical analysis of historical events.

Facilitator Guidance - Establishing a Safe and Respectful Learning Environment

Facilitators should be prepared to:

- Recognize signs of emotional distress in learners
- Pause discussions if needed to allow space for reflection or grounding
- Offer learners the option to step away briefly if they need a break
- Provide access to appropriate support resources
- Encourage respectful dialogue while prioritizing learner wellbeing

Facilitators are encouraged to:

- **Validate feelings:** Acknowledge that learners may experience a range of emotions in response to the content
- **Provide choice:** Offer multiple ways to engage, including writing, discussion, reflection, or listening
- **Encourage autonomy:** Allow learners the option to pause, step back, or observe if needed
- **Promote safety:** Establish and uphold shared agreements for respectful and inclusive dialogue
- **Maintain respect and inclusion:** Ensure all learners feel heard and respected, even when perspectives differ
- **Prioritize learning over debate:** Focus on understanding, inquiry, and reflection rather than argument or persuasion
- **Encourage curiosity:** Support thoughtful questioning and open exploration of ideas
- **Model respectful communication:** Use and reinforce language that is respectful, and inclusive
- **Separate ideas from individuals:** Remind learners to critique concepts and arguments rather than people
- **Acknowledge emotional impact:** Recognize that topics such as racism, colonization, war, and injustice may evoke strong emotional responses
- **Encourage active listening:** Support learners in listening with attention, care, and respect for differing perspectives
- **Provide varied participation options:** Allow learners to engage through discussion, writing, or reflection based on comfort level
- **Ensure equitable participation:** Structure engagement so that all learners have opportunities to contribute, and no single learner dominates, is singled out, or is overexposed

Learners should be reminded that participation in discussions or reflections can be flexible. They may choose to listen, write privately, or participate in other ways that feel comfortable.

Strategies for Managing Difficult Moments

If challenging situations arise during discussion, facilitators may consider the following strategies:

- Pause the conversation if the discussion becomes tense or emotionally charged
- Allow time for reflection or grounding
- Re-center the discussion on the learning goals of the lesson
- Encourage learners to support their ideas with historical evidence or examples from the video module
- Redirect harmful or disrespectful language by reminding learners of shared agreements
- Encourage learners to ask questions rather than make assumptions
- Offer alternative participation options, such as written reflection
- Remind learners that complex historical topics often include multiple perspectives
- **If a learner becomes distressed, pause the activity and provide appropriate support or referral**

Facilitators may establish clear community agreements at the outset, such as:

- Listening actively and without interruption
- Respecting diverse perspectives and lived experiences
- Using thoughtful language
- Critiquing ideas, and not individuals
- Maintaining confidentiality if appropriate

Community Agreements Co-Creation

Suggested Safe Space Activity (5-10 minutes):

Activity: Community Agreements Co-Creation

Instructions:

1. **Ask learners:** *What do you need in order to feel safe, respected, and heard in this learning space?*
2. Synthesize responses into a shared set of community agreements
3. Revisit these agreements throughout the module as needed

Optional Reflection Prompt:

- What does respectful dialogue look like to you when discussing complex or sensitive issues?
- How can you contribute to maintaining a constructive learning environment?

Module Structure:

Warm up: Word Association and Reflection

Estimated Time: 10 minutes

Key Concept: Historical narratives influence how people understand current events

- Learning Activities:**
- **Word Association Prompt:** What is the first word or phrase that comes to mind when you hear the term “Colonialism”?
 - **Optional Activity:**
 - ✦ Facilitators may create a word cloud using learner responses to visualize common themes, patterns, or differences in perceptions. This activity can be revisited at the end of the module to reflect on how learners’ understanding may have evolved.

Part 1: Palestine Before 1948

Estimated Time: 15–20 minutes

Key Concept: Palestine was a vibrant and diverse society long before 1948

- Learning Activities:**
- **Content Overview:**
 - ✧ Palestinian society before 1948
 - ✧ Religious diversity among Muslims, Christians, and Jews
 - ✧ Indigenous Palestinian communities
 - ✧ Cities, villages, agriculture, and culture
 - ✧ Daily life in Jaffa, Jerusalem, Haifa, and other communities
 - ✧ Challenging myths about Palestine being “empty land”
 - **Journal Prompt:**
 - ✧ Why is it important to learn about a people’s culture and daily life before studying conflict?
 - ✧ How does learning about ordinary life challenge stereotypes?
 - **Sentence Starter:**
 - ✧ *Learning about daily life helps me understand that...*
 - ✧ *One thing I learned about Palestine before 1948 is...*

Part 2: Zionism and British Colonialism

Estimated Time: 20–25 minutes

Key Concept: Political Zionism and British colonial policies significantly shaped the future of Palestine

- Learning Activities:**
- **Content Overview:**
 - ✧ Emergence of political Zionism
 - ✧ The First Zionist Congress (1897)
 - ✧ European nationalism and colonialism
 - ✧ The Sykes-Picot Agreement
 - ✧ The Balfour Declaration
 - ✧ British colonial rule in Palestine
 - ✧ Population changes during the Mandate period
 - ✧ Land acquisition and settlement expansion
 - **Journal Prompt:**
 - ✧ Why is it important to understand colonialism when studying Palestine?
 - ✧ How can decisions made by governments affect people who have little or no voice in those decisions?
 - **Sentence Starter:**
 - ✧ *Understanding colonialism helps explain...*
 - ✧ *One way colonial powers influenced Palestine was...*
 - **Knowledge Check:**
 - ✧ What was the Balfour Declaration? *Answer: Britain’s 1917 statement supporting the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine*
 - ✧ What was the Sykes-Picot Agreement? *Answer: A secret agreement between Britain and France dividing parts of the Arab world into spheres of influence*

Part 3: Partition and the Nakba

Estimated Time: 20–25 minutes

Key Concept: The Nakba refers to the mass displacement of Palestinians beginning in 1948

- Learning Activities:**
- **Content Overview:**
 - ✧ The United Nations Partition Plan of 1947
 - ✧ Unequal land allocation under the partition proposal
 - ✧ Palestinian opposition to partition
 - ✧ The Deir Yassin massacre
 - ✧ Forced displacement of Palestinian communities
 - ✧ The fall of Ramla and other Palestinian cities
 - ✧ Destruction of Palestinian villages
 - ✧ Creation of the State of Israel
 - ✧ The meaning of the Nakba (“catastrophe”)
 - **Journal Prompt:**
 - ✧ Why is it important to understand the human impact of displacement?
 - ✧ How might individuals and communities feel if they were forced to leave homes their families had lived in for generations?
 - **Sentence Starter:**
 - ✧ *The Nakba affected Palestinian communities by...*
 - ✧ *Historical events such as the Nakba continue to matter because...*
 - ✧ *Learning about displacement helps me understand...*
 - **Knowledge Check:**
 - ✧ True or False: The Nakba refers to the mass displacement of Palestinians beginning in 1948. *Answer: True*
 - ✧ What percentage of the land was allocated to the proposed Jewish state under the UN Partition Plan? *Answer: Approximately 56%*
 - ✧ What does the word Nakba mean? *Answer: Catastrophe*
 - ✧ Approximately how many Palestinian villages were depopulated or destroyed during the Nakba? *Answer: Approximately 530 villages*

Part 4: Occupation and Settlements

Estimated Time: 20–25 minutes

Key Concept: Many scholars and human rights organizations describe displacement and land confiscation as ongoing processes

- Learning Activities:**
- **Content Overview:**
 - ✧ The 1967 War
 - ✧ Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza
 - ✧ Occupation of the Golan Heights
 - ✧ Additional Palestinian displacement
 - ✧ Expansion of Israeli settlements
 - ✧ Land confiscation and territorial fragmentation
 - ✧ Settlement construction under occupation
 - ✧ The Apartheid Wall
 - ✧ Restrictions on movement and access
 - **Journal Prompt:**
 - ✧ How can physical barriers and restrictions affect people's daily lives?
 - ✧ What challenges might communities face when access to land, schools, and healthcare networks becomes limited?

- **Sentence Starter:**
 - ✎ *The construction of barriers and walls can impact people's lives by...*
 - ✎ *Understanding the effects of occupation helps me think about...*
- **Knowledge Check:**
 - ✎ In what year did Israel occupy the West Bank and Gaza? *Answer: 1967*
 - ✎ What is a settlement? *Answer: A civilian community established by Israeli settlers in occupied Palestinian territory*
 - ✎ What is the Apartheid Wall? *Answer: A barrier constructed largely within the occupied West Bank that separates Palestinian communities and land*
 - ✎ True or False: Most of the wall was built directly on Israel's internationally recognized border. *Answer: False*

Part 5: Refugees and the Right of Return

Estimated Time: 15–20 minutes

Key Concept: Palestinian refugees remain one of the largest and longest-standing refugee populations in the world

Learning Activities:

- **Content Overview:**
 - ✎ Palestinian refugee communities
 - ✎ Refugee camps in neighboring countries
 - ✎ Palestinian diaspora communities
 - ✎ International law and refugee rights
 - ✎ United Nations Resolution 194
 - ✎ The Right of Return
 - ✎ International Court of Justice findings
 - ✎ Human rights frameworks and accountability
 - ✎ Contemporary refugee experiences
- **Journal Prompt:**
 - ✎ Why do refugee rights matter?
 - ✎ What responsibilities do governments and international organizations have toward displaced populations?
- **Sentence Starter:**
 - ✎ *The Right of Return is significant because...*
 - ✎ *International law seeks to protect displaced people by...*
 - ✎ *Understanding refugee experiences helps me...*
 - ✎ *One challenge refugees may face is...*
- **Knowledge Check:**
 - ✎ What is the Right of Return? *Answer: The principle that displaced people have the right to return to their homes*
 - ✎ What does United Nations Resolution 194 address? *Answer: The right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and receive compensation*
 - ✎ Approximately how many Palestinian refugees are estimated to live worldwide today? *Answer: Between 5 and 8 million*
 - ✎ True or False: Refugee experiences can continue across multiple generations. *Answer: True*

Part 6: Honouring the Land – Reflection Activity

Estimated Time: 10–15 minutes

Key Concept: Understanding our relationship to the land can deepen awareness of historical and ongoing displacement

- Learning Activities:**
1. Use a resource like Native Land Digital to explore the Indigenous territories where you live.
 2. Research local Indigenous communities, their histories, and present-day stewardship efforts.
 3. Reflect on how land and water are protected and managed by Indigenous peoples.
 - **Journal Prompt:**
 - ✎ What is your relationship to the land and waters where you live?
 - ✎ What meaningful actions can you take to support their care and preservation?
 - ✎ How will you commit to these actions moving forward?
 - **Sentence Starter:**
 - ✎ *Social movements that acknowledge Indigenous histories and stewardship may be more effective because...*
 - ✎ *Honoring land may help guide actions for justice and solidarity by...*

Part 7: Exit Reflection

Estimated Time: 10 minutes

Learning Activities: Students may choose any one of the following formats:

- **Paper reflection slip submitted in a collection box**
- **Journal entry** kept in a notebook or document
- **Verbal reflection shared** (if comfortable)
- **Journal Prompt:**
 - ✎ One thing I learned
 - ✎ One question I still have
 - ✎ One impactful quote or idea that stuck with me

Facilitators should clearly communicate that **learners are not required to identify themselves** unless they choose to do so.

- Optional Extension Activities:**
- **Historical Research Project:** Research a Palestinian village affected by the Nakba and create a timeline documenting its history and present-day status.
 - **Media Analysis:** Compare how different media sources describe the Nakba, displacement, and refugee experiences.
 - **Mapping Activity:** Create a map showing major events discussed in the module, including villages, refugee routes, and diaspora communities.
 - **Reflection Essay:** How can historical understanding contribute to conversations about justice, human rights, and collective responsibility?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Nakba:** Arabic for “catastrophe”; refers to the mass displacement of Palestinians beginning in 1948
- **Zionism:** A political movement that sought the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine

- **Balfour Declaration (1917):** British statement supporting the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine
 - **Sykes-Picot Agreement:** Secret agreement between Britain and France dividing parts of the Arab world into spheres of influence
 - **Refugee:** A person forced to leave their home because of conflict, persecution, or violence
 - **Diaspora:** A population living outside its ancestral homeland
 - **Right of Return:** The principle that displaced people have the right to return to their homes
 - **Occupation:** Control of territory by a foreign military power
 - **Settlement:** A civilian community established by Israeli settlers in occupied territory
 - **Apartheid Wall:** Term used by human rights organizations to describe the Separation barrier built largely within the occupied West Bank
 - **United Nations Resolution 194:** UN resolution affirming the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and receive compensation
 - **Partition Plan:** United Nations proposal to divide Palestine into separate states in 1947
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