

Re-Framing the *Framework* on the Middle East

The treatment of the Middle East in the *History-Social Science Framework* is remarkable for its separation of the modern history of the region from the colonial past, its failure to recognize fundamental differences between the problems of “nationalism” of colonizers and settlers on the one hand and of the colonized on the other, and its choice of words that suggest an emotional, non-rational context for events in the region. Below *Framework* language is shown on the left with selected passages highlighted and alternate language addressing these issues shown on the right.

The Middle East: Israel and Syria. Since World War II, the Middle East has been a political hotbed unsettled by the passions of nationalism and religion. This region has been in almost continual ferment not only because of wars between Israel and the Arab nations but also because of tensions between Arab nations and among different Islamic groups, including the differences between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. The fragile political affairs of the area are further aggravated by its strategic importance as a supplier of oil to the industrialized world, ***the unresolved problems of the displaced Palestinian refugees, the recurrent use of terrorism among adversaries,*** the disruptions associated with the interaction of traditional cultures and the forces of modernization, and the importance of this region as a focus of East-West rivalries. Careful study of political and resource maps should help students understand the relative location and the geopolitical, cultural, military, and economic significance of such key states as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Kuwait, Iraq, and Iran. ***Students can more deeply analyze the problems of this vital region by an examination of two strategically important states, Israel and Syria. A review of the history of Israel should include the importance of the land in Jewish religious history and should trace the history of Zionism, with special reference to the Holocaust as a factor in the creation of Israel in 1948. Attention should be paid to its democratic parliamentary government, free press, and independent judiciary.*** Students should understand challenges such as accommodating the demands of orthodox religious groups, the internal debate over the West Bank, the issue of Palestinian statehood, ***the conflict between Jews and Arabs*** within Israel, an economy overburdened by military expenditures, and ***Israel's existence in a hostile region.*** Students should trace Syria's long history and examine its present status as a strategically important Arab nation. ***Syria should be seen within the context of a region that has sought Pan Arab unity while working to overcome problems of illiteracy, shortage of health services, ethnic rivalries, and religious tensions.*** Attention should be paid to the form of government in Syria, the status of minorities, government control of the media, and Syria's regional and military importance in the world today. Students should be aware of the peace process in the Middle East and ***the role of the United States, including the Camp David Accords in 1978, the Treaty of Peace between Israel and Jordan in 1994, and the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement.***

In this unit students should examine the different paths to nationhood of Syria and Israel. Students should learn about the role of European powers in determining the boundaries and leaders of independent Syria and about the demographic and political consequences of the independence process. Students should also learn about the role of the United Nations, European powers, and the Zionist movement in the creation of Israel, and of the processes by which proponents of a Jewish state took control of the land that became Israel.

...on-going impact on the region of large numbers of Palestinian refugees who were displaced when Israel was founded, the recurrent use of bombings and assassinations by state and non-state actors...

Students should use an examination of Syria and Israel to analyze the pressing issues of this region more deeply. A review of the history of Israel should examine the history of Zionism, the 1917 Balfour Declaration of British support for the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, Jewish immigration to Palestine during the British mandate, and the role of the Holocaust in framing Western opinion about the creation of Israel. Attention should be paid to its parliamentary form of government, free press and independent judiciary as well as to the structure of *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination that relegates its Arab citizens to second class status.

...the legacy of a state formation process based on immigrants from other regions of the world taking land long held by local inhabitants.

Syria should be seen in the context of a region with ancient and sophisticated civilizations that were divided among European colonizers, and then formed into modern nation-states. Students should learn about the ethnic and religious diversity of the new states and about the legacy of social and political instability that resulted from the de-colonization process.

...the role of the United States in trying to be a peace broker while at the same time being the chief military, economic and political supporter of one side.