

The Birth of a Nation

Activity objectives:

1. Familiarity with the course of events that led to the Declaration of the State of Israel.
2. Familiarity with the people and leaders involved in the Declaration and their personal narrative about the event
3. Understanding the importance and significance of the Declaration of Independence along with the process that lead to drafting the Charter.
4. Develop emotional connection to the declaration as an important and meaningful event in Jewish history.

Age group: Middle school and up

Duration: This activity is modular and includes various components that you can pick and choose from. Allow at least 45 minutes for the basic activity and up to 3 hours for the full activity proposed.

Location: Indoors or outside.

Materials needed:

- Timeline + 6 event cards
- 6 "My Declaration" booklets
- Backdrop and tablecloth for a reenactment of the Declaration
- "Our Declaration" posters
- Photo kit
- Pens and paper
- Projector and speakers (not mandatory)
- Yom Ha'atsmaut presentation (not mandatory)

Modular Activity Timeline:

45 min'- Timeline, Our Declaration

90 min'- Timeline, The People Behind the Declaration, Our Declaration

3 hours- Full activity

Activity Structure

Opening:

Introduce the subject of activity:

This activity will review the events that led to the Declaration of Israel's independence. We will do this in an abbreviated and concise manner, and try to understand the main sequence of events and circumstances, challenges, motivations and dilemmas that the founders of the State had to face. We will get personally acquainted with the founders of the state, focusing not only on the most famous ones, but also with some who remained "in the shadow" despite the significant role they've played. If we succeed, we will experience just a bit of the excitement that accompanied this historic announcement, we'll examine how it is relevant to each and every one of us today and what we can learn from it for the future of the State of Israel.

Part 1: "Previously on 'the birth of a Nation'"

- Materials: Timeline + 6 event cards

Ask - who knows their Jewish history? Choose 6 people who've raised their hands. Each of them will receive an index card and as a group they will be asked to lay their cards down in chronological order on the timeline.

Note: Do not expect the participants, let alone those who are younger, to know the correct answers right away. Expect that there will be 2-4 attempts to succeed with this task. Once they accomplish the task, review the events in the correct order. The events are:

1. The Katovitch Convention

The establishing convention of the חֵיבַת צִיּוֹן (Chibbat Tzion) movement in the city of Katovich, Poland, brought together and united all of the small and secret Zionist clubs and organizations that started in Eastern Europe as a result of pogroms and Anti-Semitism. This convention laid down the foundations for an organized national-Jewish movement. The atmosphere was festive as the participants believed this is a new era for the Jewish people.

(Answer- 1884)

2. The First Zionist Congress

Theodor Herzl's initiative to convene all Zionist organizations active worldwide in the city of Basel, Switzerland. The congress approved the

המחלוקה הפדגוגית, האגף לחינוך ולנוער, קרן קיימת לישראל

Basel program, which declared that "The Zionist movement aspires to establish a refuge for the Jewish people in the land of Israel".

(Answer: 1897)

3. Establishment of the JNF

The Jewish National Fund is the executive branch of the World Zionist movement. The fund acted to recruit the resources needed to purchase lands in the Land of Israel and to utilize it for Jewish settlement.

(Answer: 1901)

4. The British Mandate

A geopolitical entity under British administration, that was created after World War I. The British civil administration in Palestine operated from 1920 until 1948. During this time the British government withdrew their previous commitment made in the Balfur Declaration, where they committed to work towards the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in the land of Israel.

5. Kaf" Tet Benovember

The United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine was a proposal developed by the United Nations, which recommended a partition between the Jews and Arabs in Mandatory Palestine following the termination of the British Mandate. On 29 November 1947, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution recommending the adoption and implementation of the Plan of Resolution 181. Thirty three countries voted for the plan, thirteen against it, and ten sustained.

6. The Declaration of Independence (5/14/1948)

Background

Summarize the events on the timeline and focus on the events that occurred between the 29th of November until the State was declared on 14 May 1948.

Read:

A day after the UN vote on the partition plan on 11.29.1947 the War of Independence started. There were attacks on two buses, which killed seven passengers, marking the beginning of the war. The attacks on the Jewish Yishuv spread all over the country, and every place the soldiers of the British Mandate left soon turned into a battlefield.

The Jewish Yishuv, which numbered 650 thousand people, is protected by the forces of three underground military organizations: The Haganah, the Irgun (The National Military Organization in the Land of Israel) and the Lehi (Fighters for the Freedom of Israel - also known as the Stern gang). A large part of the fighting took place around the main highway arteries. Jerusalem is divided and besieged. There is a severe shortage of food and water and access is blocked.

At a special meeting of the Zionist Worker's Committee on the 12th April 1948 the People's Council in Tel Aviv have 37 members elected by the Zionist Administration based on political parties and representation. The People's Council, similar to today's Knesset, have delegates that represent all the segments of Israeli society: religious, secular, right and left. They must all reach an agreement on the fate of the Jewish community. Out of the council 13 are chosen to be members of the People's Administration (provisional government), headed by David Ben-Gurion.

The JNF house on Zvi Herman Shapira St. in Tel Aviv is to house the proceedings of the People's Council and its administration, in the auditorium crucial meetings are being held for the creation of the State: the formulation of government institutions, management of the war, the discussions on the nature of the future state, and the mechanisms to operate it, the choice of a name.

In Jerusalem a legal team begins to draft the Declaration of Independence for the Jewish state, but when the communication with Jerusalem is broken due to the war the drafting task is imposed on the Tel Aviv team. Many versions are written, drafts are erased and changed. Each word is fateful and meaningful.

There is a huge amount of uncertainty - all the teams are working hard on preparations for the establishment of the State, while the final decision on the declaration of the Jewish state immediately upon the termination of the British Mandate has not yet been decided: the past months have made it clear that the Arab countries are threatening to invade Palestine with their troops immediately after the British leave. Days before the termination of the Mandate Golda Meir makes a secret visit to King Abdullah of Jordan, a country that has always been considered the most moderate in the region, and reports that the King has decided to join the war alongside the other Arab countries. Moshe Sharett returned from his mission to the United States and says that the US government does not support the declaration of a State

immediately after the British departure until after a temporary period of "trustee rule" to calm the situation in the country. They offer an immediate ceasefire, which means postponing the declaration indefinitely. The de-facto military commander (the IDF has not been established, only the three underground organizations), Yigal Yadin, believes the chance of success in the war is only 50% if the Arab armies invade, his view reflects the military inferiority of the Jewish Yishuv.

Within the People's Council and in the Jewish Yishuv there are those who support the Declaration on the fifth of Iyar, the 14th of May 1948, and are sure that this historic opportunity should not be missed, and there are also those that oppose the Declaration immediately upon the departure of the British, fearing that the Declaration could lead to an unmitigated disaster.

Will they decide to declare the Jewish state despite all the risks? What exactly will the Declaration include? What will happen the day after?

Part 2: Formulating a State

- Materials: Whiteboard, paper and pens

Preparing for the Declaration:

Among the members of the People's Council there were religious and secular Jews, socialists and communists, Ashkenazi and Mizrahi, young and old, pioneers and activists, immigrants from various countries and members of different political parties. They would approve the text of the Declaration of Independence, which would define the principles and values of the new state.

How did they manage to reach an agreement?

To illustrate the challenges that faced the People's Council and the National Council when attempting to draft the declaration, we will run the following simulation:

Discussion

Divide into six work teams. On the board write a list of issues that need to be integrated into the official declaration of a state; here are a few examples:

- Defining the state borders
- The country's historical narrative
- Justification for recognizing the State
- The place of the Jewish religion
- Status of Jerusalem

המחלקה הפדגוגית, האגף לחינוך ולנוער, קרן קיימת לישראל

- Name of the country
- The status of the Torah in the country
- Relations with neighboring countries
- Relations with distant countries
- Creating alliances
- Settlement policies
- Immigration Policy - who is entitled to immigrate to Israel?
- Basic Laws
- Attitude towards the Holocaust
- Vision of the future for the fledgling State

Ask the participants to add more issues.

Divide paper and pens to each participant. Ask them to come up with an individual list of the three most important issues that need to be included in the Declaration of the State of Israel. Then, as a team, ask them to come up with an agreed upon list. Allow the teams 5 minutes to come up with their team list.

At the end of the designated time, convene in a plenum and talk about the difficulties surrounding the need to agree upon 3 key issues; the need to make such a decision under time pressures and the need to make concessions and compromises. Reference this experience to the actual process that led to the Declaration- talk about the short amount of time the members of the People's Council had to draft the Declaration and the many drafts that were proposed. Indicate how difficult it is to define and decide such crucial decisions that will determine the face of a nation about to be born.

To read more about the different drafts of the Charter:

<http://portal.idc.ac.il/he/megila/archive/pages/docarchive.aspx>
<http://portal.idc.ac.il/he/megila/archive/pages/docarchive.aspx>

<http://portal.idc.ac.il/he/megila/archive/pages/docarchive.aspx>

<http://portal.idc.ac.il/he/megila/archive/pages/docarchive.aspx>

Part 3: The People Behind the Declaration

- Materials: 6 "My Declaration" booklets, pens and paper

Re-divide into the 6 work teams. Each team will receive a "My Declaration" booklet, paper and pens. Each team will learn about the historic figure it received, look at the pictures of their historic figure and get to know him/her, and choose one sentence that represents the narrative of the Declaration as told through their perspective, representing this historic figure's particular

המחלקה הפדגוגית, האגף לחינוך ולנוער, קרן קיימת לישראל

point of view. If they have not found a suitable sentence, have the members of the team draft such a statement themselves.

Who am I?

At the end of the time designated for this activity, call a representative from each team to address the plenum and introduce the team's narrative, while the other teams need to guess which character it is.

Note: There is no need to guess the name of the character and do not expect that other participants will recognize these characters at all. The guiding question is: In light of the group's presentation, what is the relationship of the character towards the declaration of the state? What was the role of the character in relation to the declaration?

Help the teams guess the historic figure. Emphasize that he/she were not necessarily the people who signed the Declaration of Independence or the decision makers, and that there were other figures involved in the preparation of the historical event. If they are finding it difficult to guess give the participants more clues.

After they had guessed correctly, have the presenting team expand further on the figure's biography.

Explain how cooperation, dedication, leadership and commitment were all required from all those involved in the declaration - from the secretary and the ceremony stage designer to David Ben-Gurion himself.

Read aloud the description of the declaration as written by Golda Meir, in her autobiography "My Life":

"At 4 pm exactly, the ceremony began. Ben-Gurion, wearing a dark suit and tie, got to his feet and hammered the gavel. According to the plan this was supposed to be a sign for the orchestra, tucked away on the second floor gallery, to play the "Tikvah". But something went wrong and there was no music. Spontaneously, we stood up and sang our national anthem. Then Ben Gurion cleared his throat and said quietly: "I will read the founding document of the State of Israel." In only fifteen minutes he read the declaration as a whole. He read it slowly and clearly, and I remember that his voice changed and rose a bit when he got to the eleventh article:

Therefore we gathered, we the members of the People's Council, representatives of the Yishuv and the Zionist movement, at the end of

the British Mandate in the Land of Israel, and by the by virtue of our natural and historical right, and on the basis of the decision by the UN General Assembly, we hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel, the State of Israel.

The State of Israel! My eyes filled with tears and my hands trembled. We had done it. We had brought the Jewish state - and I, Golda Mabovitch Meyerson, I was fortunate to be there that day. Whatever will happen now, and whatever the cost may be - we re-established the Jewish national home."

Part 4: Our Declaration (Summary)

- Materials needed: "Our Declaration" posters and pens

Reiterate how hard it was for the representatives of the people to cooperate, take responsibility and formulate the final draft of the Declaration of Independence, with every word being significant and fateful. Eventually they were able to come up with a version that was unanimously agreed upon by all members. But is this Declaration relevant to us nowadays?

Ask:

How can we make sure the vision of the Declaration of Independence will remain relevant in the reality of Israel today?

Discuss with the participants the importance of the state to have a defined and implementable vision for the future. Ask the participants to offer practical proposals, how each person can make a difference, lead and become involved. Give examples from the field of Zionist ecology and additional fields the Jewish National Fund is engaged in, calling them to join and lead in these fields.

Following the discussion, divide the group into teams of 4-6 participants. Each team will receive paper and pens. Their objective is to write a one-sentence vision for Israel's future that will include specific and implementable goals for Israel today.

Back on the plenum, each team will share their written vision statement for Israel. Write all of these sentences on the "Our Declaration" poster attached to this kit.

Announcing and signing

- Materials needed: Backdrop and blue tablecloth for the declaration
Reenactment: costumes and wigs (not mandatory),
"Our Declaration" poster, pens

While a volunteer from the group writes all of the vision statements neatly on the "Our Declaration" poster, invite the rest of the group to prepare the classroom for a reenactment of the Declaration of Independence, using the components within the kit:

1. Hang the backdrop on a wall, set up a long table and spread the blue tablecloth on it.
2. Appoint one talented group member to play "Ben-Gurion" (you can use costumes and a wig but it's not required, you can nominate other figures like Golda Meir and Moshe Sharet as well).
3. Arrange the People's Assembly seats according to the original seating arrangement (the photo booklet can assist you with the set up).
4. Seat the representatives along the table.
5. Invite "Ben Gurion" to read the original paragraph "The State of Israel will be ..." and then continue with the declaration the group formulated.
6. Finally, invite each participant (in alphabetical order) to sign the Charter. At the end of the ceremony, hang the "Our Declaration" poster on the classroom wall.

