

## Teaching Gaza (2023) through a Multiple Narratives Approach

### **Overview & Pedagogical Approach**

More than ten years ago I developed a framework for teaching what is most referred to as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that would honor districts' policies on teaching controversial issues and stay true to the discipline of social sciences. It is often assumed that teaching about Palestine, and now what is happening in Gaza is too difficult and/or controversial. There are often attempts at silencing or encouraging teachers NOT to incorporate Palestine into their curriculum. This framework has been used by many educators to teach Palestine, and other historical events/times in history and it has helped facilitate student centered units with teacher as facilitator. The multiple narratives approach asks students to analyze historical facts through a critical lens and honor the idea that historical facts combined with the way humans experience them create historical narratives. Some of these narratives are told and retold while others may be hidden or suppressed. It is the goal of this approach to be inclusive of as many narratives as possible, encourage students to bring in their knowledge, and have it all be based on student analysis of text sets.

This pedagogical framework challenges students to learn content and apply critical thinking skills to synthesize what they are learning and come to their own conclusions. It allows teachers to facilitate the learning of content and skill; specifically document analysis, critical media literacy, and summary writing. This framework is an attempt to balance the idea of history as a discipline based on facts with history as a collection of human experiences based on peoples' memories and perspectives.

The framework is based on teaching students to analyze documents through the ideas of: facts, perspectives, narratives, and truth. The working definitions used can be found below. It specifically asks students to consider facts and truths to be distinct. The premise is that facts are often layered with perspective which create a narrative that then is passed along as a truth. This truth does not often equate to fact because the facts have been changed. These concepts can be introduced to students through non-historical or historical content so students have a clear idea of each concept before they start to apply them to historical content. There are examples of this below. This framework was developed to be applied to any historical unit of study that is guided by specific anchor questions you want students to develop responses to; or be able to discuss. You can use it in other class settings besides the social sciences and it is often best complemented by teaching critical literacy and media skills<sup>1</sup> or reviewing them if you have already covered this.

There is a **working** document [set](#) focused on the events that have unfolded in Gaza since October 7th; including documents that cover what happened on October 7th. This set is not exhaustive; you may find additional sources you want to add, as well as some you may want to exclude given the essential questions you are focused on. This particular set was created to address the question of whether what is happening in Gaza currently meets the definition of genocide based on the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide used as the standard in The State of California Model Curriculum for Human Rights and Genocide Curriculum<sup>2</sup>. Students may also want to offer additional sources from perspectives that may not have been included and since the premise is to include multiple perspectives (meaning a range of perspectives including within the Palestinian and Israeli and Jewish communities). Lastly, there is also a **working document set** for the humanitarian crisis question.

The events that unfolded in Gaza after October 7th, 2023 are part of the longer history of Palestine/Israel and should be contextualized as such in order to give students the best understanding; even if that context is summarized. This context will include Hamas' actions on October 7th, but their actions should not be the starting

---

<sup>1</sup> This framework aligns well with [Chapter 10](#) (pg. 939) of the ELA/ELD framework which outlines the need for critical literacy skills to be developed under deeper learning & 21st century skills.

<sup>2</sup> CA Model Curriculum for Human Rights: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/im/documents/modelcurrchrqenoc.pdf>

point. It is important to anchor this unit in essential questions that students are focused on developing responses to; and potential examples of these are provided below. It is also important to keep students open to outcome; this can be a challenge for students with close ties to the region and issues, but if they feel safe, they will be open to learning more.

Lastly, since this document set was created while the events in Gaza were unfolding, it is likely that some will need to be updated. Every attempt was made to include the date and source (specifically if it is referring to numbers of people).

## Standards & CA Curriculum Alignment

---

### [CA Model Curriculum for Human Rights](#)

#### [Social Justice Standards](#)

#### [HSS Framework Standards](#) Alignment for [World History](#)

10.9 Students analyze the international developments in the post-World War II world.

- Understand how the forces of nationalism developed in the Middle East, how the Holocaust affected world opinion regarding the need for a Jewish state, and the significance and effects of the location and *establishment of Israel on world affairs*.

10.10 Students analyze instances of nation-building in the *contemporary world* in at least two of the following regions or countries: *the Middle East*, Africa, Mexico and other parts of Latin America, and China.

- Understand the *challenges in the regions*, including their geopolitical, cultural, military, and economic *significance and the international relationships in which they are involved*.
- Describe the *recent history of the regions*, including political divisions and systems, key leaders, religious issues, natural features, resources, and population patterns.
- *Discuss the important trends in the regions today and whether they appear to serve the cause of individual freedom and democracy*.

## Framework Definitions and Examples

### FACT, PERSPECTIVE, NARRATIVE, AND TRUTH

*Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts.*

*~Daniel Patrick Moynihan*

**Question: Who is the best soccer player in the world; Cristiano Ronaldo or Lionel Messi?**

Framework Term	Definition
Fact	Something that has really occurred or is actually the case; a truth known by actual observation or authentic testimony, as opposed to what is inferred, guessed, or hypothesized; a product of experience, as distinguished from the conclusions that may be based upon it.
	<b>Example:</b> Cristiano Ronaldo & Lionel Messi are professional soccer players.
Perspective	A particular attitude towards or way thinking about something; an individual point of view.
	<b>Example:</b> Winning a World Cup is unnecessary to be considered the best player of all time.
Narrative	The story we tell or believe, in order to explain how a set of facts or events are connected to each other.
	<b>Example:</b> The best player in the world should be based on overall soccer statistics, soccer service to their country's national team, number of goals scored and assisted on and personal characteristics/service to others.
Truth	The quality of being true; conformity with fact or reality; an obvious or accepted fact; the character of being, or disposition to be, true to a person, principle, cause. In this unit, we will use "truth" as something each person creates for him/herself—an interpretation of <i>facts</i> based on his or her own <i>perspective</i> .
	<b>Example:</b> Based on his soccer performance up to 2024, Cristiano Ronaldo (or can insert Lionel Messi) is the best soccer player in the world.

This example is based on these two particular players most often being called the greatest soccer players currently in the game; although there may be other players who people believe are the best. You can change the question to Who is the best soccer player in the world and expand the field of players offered. This is just one of many examples that can be used to introduce students to the terms in the framework.

**FACT, PERSPECTIVE, NARRATIVE, AND TRUTH**

*Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts.*

*~Daniel Patrick Moynihan*

**Question: Was the outcome of the Cold War worth the money the United States spent “fighting” it?**

Framework Term	Definition
Fact	Something that has really occurred or is actually the case; a truth known by actual observation or authentic testimony, as opposed to what is inferred, guessed, or hypothesized; a product of experience, as distinguished from the conclusions that may be based upon it.
	<b>Example:</b> Eight trillion dollars (\$8,000,000,000,000) was spent, worldwide, on nuclear and other weapons between 1945 and 1996. At their peak, the world's nuclear stockpiles held 18 billion metric tons of explosive energy: 18,000 megatons. Today, they still hold 8,000 megatons. Compare these totals with the entire explosive energy released by all bombs dropped in the Second World War (6 megatons); in the Korean War (0.8 megatons); in Vietnam (4.1 megatons).
Perspective	A particular attitude towards or way thinking about something; an individual point of view.
	<b>Examples:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The money the U.S. spent fighting the Cold War <b>was worth it</b> to protect the U.S. and the rest of the world from communism. Communist dictators in the U.S.S.R. and their satellite countries were oppressing their own people. The expansion of communism was threatening to the United States' freedom and democracy.</li><li>• The U.S. overreacted to the communist threat; the billions of dollars we spent fighting the Cold War <b>was not worth it</b>. Communism may have been a phase that would have come and gone without any resistance from the U.S.</li><li>• Communism was threatening, but not enough to justify the billions of dollars spent fighting the Cold War. The United States was not even successful in all of the countries in which it tried to stop the spread of communism. There are many other more useful ways in which this money could have been spent.</li><li>• The spread of communism was a threat that justified spending so much money because the USSR was gaining too much power with their influences in other countries and advances in technology. The U.S. was the only country after World War II powerful enough to take on the USSR.</li></ul>
	The story we tell or believe, in order to explain how a set of facts or events are connected to each other.
	<b>Examples:</b>

<p style="text-align: center;">Narrative</p>	<p><b>Communism is good because it makes everyone equal.</b> Communist states provide healthcare and education for all their citizens. The state controls the economy and makes sure that all citizens have jobs that pay them enough money. The government rations food to ensure that no one goes hungry. Although a dictator is usually in control of the government, this control should eventually fade away, leaving all citizens of the country equally in control of their own fates and the future of their country.</p> <p><b>Communism is bad because it is oppressive and unfair.</b> Citizens of communist countries have little control over their own lives. They are told where to work and have no power over how successful they are or how much money they make. They must rely on the state for healthcare and education, which can vary in quality. Dictators of communist countries can become brutal and controlling and unfairly punish their citizens or take away their rights.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Truth</p>	<p>The quality of being true; conformity with fact or reality; an obvious or accepted fact; the character of being, or disposition to be, true to a person, principle, cause. In this unit, we will use “truth” as something each person creates for him/herself—an interpretation of <i>facts</i> based on his or her own <i>perspective</i>.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> The money the US spent fighting the Cold War was worth it because at the end it stopped the spread of Communism and the USSR eventually crumbled. It led to the United States developing major advancements in technology and industry and maintained the United States as the superpower of the world.</p>
<p>Instead of giving students the example of the truth you can ask them: What do <i>you</i> think? Was the money spent fighting the Cold War worth it?</p>	