



Educational Resource

# Understanding Palestine



TEACH PALESTINE

دَرَسْ عَنْ فَلَاسْطِين



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*Photographs of Life in Palestine,  
The Public Domain Review.*

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**What is *Palestine*?**  
**Who are *Palestinians*?**

# **What is *Palestine*?**

## **Who are *Palestinians*?**

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Palestinians are Arabs who live in historic Palestine or are a part of the broader Palestinian diaspora. Palestine is the geographical territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the east bank of the Jordan River. The Palestinian people have a distinct culture, rich traditions, and deep-rooted presence in this land for centuries. There are approximately 14 million Palestinians worldwide, with roughly half residing in historic Palestine and the other half living in diaspora communities. The largest populations in exile are in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as in countries across Europe, the Americas, and the Gulf. Palestinians in the diaspora often face legal, social, and economic marginalization, and their right of return remains a central demand in the struggle for justice and self-determination.

# **What is *Palestine*?**

## **Who are *Palestinians*?**

*Continued.*

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The Palestinian diaspora refers to the global population of Palestinians who live outside of historic Palestine due to forced displacement. This dispersion began with the Nakba (Arabic for “catastrophe”) in 1948, when over 750,000 Palestinians were expelled or fled from their homes during the creation of the State of Israel. It continued during the Naksa (“setback”) in 1967, when another wave of Palestinians were displaced following Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem after the Six-Day War. The most recent iteration of genocide and ethnic cleansing, which began in Gaza in 2023, has created a new and devastating chapter in this history, displacing hundreds of thousands more Palestinians and further fragmenting Palestinian society.

*Photo by Johannes Schenk on Unsplash.*

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# What is anti-Palestinian racism?



# What is anti-Palestinian racism?

Anti-Palestinian racism is adjacent to Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism, but specifically aims to silence, erase, dehumanize, and defame Palestinians and their allies who publicly advocate for Palestinian human rights. This form of racism intersects with colonialism, sexism, xenophobia, cultural appropriation, and more; it seeks to justify and normalize Palestinian dispossession and oppression, as well as to isolate diaspora Palestinians and discourage them from advocating for Palestinian liberation.

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There have been many cases where students and staff have experienced anti-Palestinian racism and censorship because of something they have worn, such as the keffiyeh. The keffiyeh is considered cultural attire representing Palestinian national identity and ethnicity. Other attire, such as watermelon symbols, or phrases like “Free Palestine”, are expressions wishing for justice and equality and respect for Palestinian humanity.

# What is anti-Palestinian racism?

*Continued.*

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Prohibiting student attire with Pro-Palestine messages is a violation of protected student speech as decided in [Tinker v. Des Moines](#). Fear of disruption alone is not enough to legally censor attire that is worn for symbolic protest; there must be evidence of actual disruption. In fact, it stigmatizes and discriminates against students when schools punish them because they express support for Palestinian lives. Schools cannot apply stricter rules only to viewpoints in favor of Palestine, and they cannot apply extra scrutiny to enforce rules only against support for Palestine. Censoring student speech on Palestine can violate their rights to be free from discrimination (Title VI and similar state laws).

Employees' rights to wear keffiyehs and other expressions of support for Palestine may also be protected under employment discrimination laws (Title VII). If an administrator brings up your attire as an issue, you may refer to other staff wearing cultural attire in the form of jewelry or clothing, and how they have not been censored. This may only apply if you are of Palestinian or Arab descent. Read more at the [EEOC's FAQ: National Origin Discrimination](#).



# What is happening in Palestine and how does it affect us?

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*Photo by Brett Sayles on Unsplash.*

# What is currently happening in Palestine and how does it impact those of us in the USA?

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Today, 14 million people—7 million Palestinians and 7 million Israelis—live between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The Israeli government and military exercise near-total control over this entire population. Most Palestinians live without citizenship or a voice in the government that rules them through military force. The Palestinian Authority (PA) has limited autonomy in parts of the West Bank and Gaza, but overall, Palestinians have been denied self-determination, creating an undemocratic, one-state reality.

For 75 years, Israel has oppressed Palestinians through policies such as forced displacement, the denial of refugees' right to return, military rule, systemic inequality, and violent repression. Israel has maintained a brutal 55-year military occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, while the Gaza Strip remains under siege. Meanwhile, Palestinian refugees, displaced in 1948, continue to be denied the right to return to their homes. Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, who make up 20% of the population, face over 60 discriminatory laws that relegate them to second-class status.

# What is currently happening in Palestine and how does it impact those of us in the USA?

*Continued.*

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The United States is the largest provider of weapons to Israel, supplying more taxpayer-funded military aid than any other country. In most years, the U.S. gives Israel more weapons than all other nations combined. Since World War II, Israel has been the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. financial aid. This significant military support makes the U.S. complicit in Israel's ongoing violation of Palestinian human rights.

Israel uses U.S. weapons, including fighter jets and helicopter gunships, in frequent attacks against Palestinians in Gaza. Since 2009, these attacks have killed thousands of Palestinian civilians and destroyed homes, schools, hospitals, mosques, and businesses. U.S.-made Caterpillar bulldozers are also used to demolish Palestinian homes and build Israeli-only settlements on stolen land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. These weapons play a central role not only in Israel's land confiscation but also in the injury and killing of Palestinian civilians in the West Bank.

We encourage all educators to study Palestine in depth. [Here](#) is a list of recommended books and resources for further reading.

*Photo by Levi Meir Clancy  
on Unsplash.*

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# The importance of teaching Palestine

# Why is it important to teach about Palestine and/or include it in already established curricular units?

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Teaching about Palestine is important because it provides a deeper understanding of global history, politics, and human rights. Including Palestine and Arab American studies in established curricula fosters critical thinking and cultural awareness, helping students engage with diverse perspectives. Palestine's history is deeply connected to broader themes like resilience, colonialism, displacement, and resistance, which are relevant to many subjects, including history, geography, and literature.

Unfortunately, research has shown that the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of Palestinians and Arab Americans broadly are often left out or misrepresented in educational curricula. Teaching about Palestine combats the proliferation of stereotypes and biases about Palestinians in schools and in our society at large. The inclusion of Palestine in educational materials is critical to improving the learning outcomes and experiences for all students.

Educating students about Palestine encourages informed discussions on justice, international relations, and the power of storytelling in shaping narratives. Including Palestine in curriculum aligns with **common core standards** and often fits in well with other established state standards.



*Photo by Leon Wu on Unsplash.*

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# How repression affects students



## How are students impacted when teaching Palestine is repressed and wholly ignored?

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Resisting the silencing of Palestinian identity and narratives is crucial in challenging misinformation and ensuring that all voices are heard. When Palestine is erased from the classroom—whether through omission of its history, suppression of Palestinian identity, or denial of the violence Palestinians have faced—students, particularly Palestinian Americans, suffer deep psychological and emotional harm. This erasure often takes the form of harmful narratives such as: “Palestine isn’t on the map,” “You’re not actually Palestinian, you’re an Israeli Arab,” or the myth that Palestine was “a land without a people.” These statements work to deny Palestinian existence, history, and ties to their land, echoing larger patterns of state violence and media complicity—like the denial of the Nakba or the dismissal of well-documented Palestinian suffering, such as in Gaza.

# How are students impacted when teaching Palestine is repressed and wholly ignored?

*Continued.*

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The consequences are profound: Palestinian students grow up in environments that invalidate their lived experiences, discourage them from sharing their truth, and teach them that their identity is controversial or dangerous. This silencing breeds isolation and trauma. Meanwhile, all students lose the opportunity to develop a well rounded, justice-oriented understanding of global issues. Ignoring or repressing Palestine in education reinforces dehumanizing narratives and robs students of the chance to engage critically with issues of colonization, identity, and resistance.



# Curricular resources supporting educators

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*Photo by Soroush  
Bahramian on Unsplash.*

## Where can we find curricular resources to support educators?

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The [Teach Palestine Project \(TPP\)](https://teachpalestine.org) has been curating resources for educators, community members, and families for over a decade. As educators, we have the unique opportunity to engage students in humanizing, life-affirming pedagogies that nurture critical thinking, empathy, and global awareness. Teaching Palestine is about more than just history; it is about sharing intergenerational stories of resilience, dignity, and connection to land. It invites students to reflect on topics at the intersections of home, immigration, borders, environmental justice, U.S. policies in the Middle East, and more. Teach Palestine empowers and supports educators in integrating these powerful narratives into their classrooms, fostering an inclusive learning environment where all students can engage critically with the history and contemporary realities of the South West Asia/North Africa (SWANA) region. By doing so, we broaden students' perspectives, deepen their understanding, and inspire them to engage with the world around them.

## Where can we find curricular resources to support educators?

*Continued.*

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The TPP provides consultations and professional learning for educators, leaders, and districts on creating safe learning environments for Palestinian students, meaningfully incorporating Palestine into K-12 curriculum, and developing educators' content knowledge on Palestine. Additionally, you can find resource lists of reviewed educational materials on Palestine.



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*Photo by Ngar  
Amini on Unsplash*

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# Is teaching Palestine antisemitic?

## Is teaching Palestine antisemitic?

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No. PARCEO, a community research, resource, and education center defines anti-semitism as “ discrimination, targeting, violence, and dehumanizing stereotypes directed at Jews because they are Jewish.” Unfortunately, the cynical and weaponized mis-definition of anti-semitism has been used to harm, silence, and malign educational communities and professionals. In an open letter to the US Secretary of Education in February of 2024, the [ACLU rejected definitions](#) of antisemitism that encompass protected speech, in particular the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s working definition, which attempts to portray any criticism of Israel and its policies as antisemitic. “Israel” is a nation state. “Zionism” is a political ideology that believes that Jews have an exclusive right to a nation state on the land that belongs to Palestinians. Criticizing Israel or Zionism means criticizing the nation state and its policies and ideology– not criticizing Jewish people. “Anti-Zionism” means opposing the political ideology of Zionism, and supporting justice for the Palestinian people, including their right to return to their homes and land. We encourage educators and administrators to review and use the [Curriculum on Antisemitism from a Framework of Collective Liberation](#) to combat anti-semitism, anti-Palestinian racism, and all forms of racism, oppression, and xenophobia.



*Photo by David McLenachan on Unsplash.*

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# **Ways administrators can support teachers**



## **What are ways that administrators can support teachers who want to include Palestine in their curriculum?**

Support the teacher's decision to include Palestine in their curriculum because it addresses anti-Palestinian racism, responds to student curiosity, and promotes critical thinking to educate global citizens. Education leaders and administrators should:

- Understand the district's policies as it relates to teaching topics perceived to be "controversial" and support teachers in aligning their work to meet site and district expectations.
  - Be available to answer teacher questions and review materials if asked.
  - Avoid applying discriminatory scrutiny to Palestine that you do not apply to other issues.

## What are ways that administrators can support teachers who want to include Palestine in their curriculum?

*Continued.*

- Support teachers in documenting students' questions and interest in learning about current events in Palestine and related issues in U.S. politics.
- Provide opportunities for professional development that include Palestinian voices and experiences. If you need support in identifying these, **please contact us**.
- Work with local teachers associations, collective bargaining units, and other professional organizations to solidify policies that protect teachers rights to academic freedom.



*Photo by Haroon Ameer on Unsplash*

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# Know Your Rights resources



## What does the law say about teaching Palestine?

Teachers and students have First Amendment rights in the classroom. They are not absolute but fundamental principles of free speech, free inquiry, and anti-discrimination support the importance of teaching Palestine. The law supports and indicates that students have a right to receive and have access to information. In some states, this right is established by binding legal authority. For example, the Ninth Circuit federal court in *Arce v. Douglas* ruled in 2015 that, a “state may not remove materials otherwise available in a local classroom unless its actions are reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns.” Moreover, in some states, students’ right to receive information is not a legal right, but it is a persuasive educational principle that students should have access to information in order to learn and express their ideas.”

# Know Your Rights

*Continued.*

The Supreme Court has also noted “the importance of protecting the ‘robust exchange of ideas.’ By their nature, these exchanges may sometimes involve uncomfortable conversations – but a system of education which discovers truth out of a multitude of tongues must allow teachers and their students to explore difficult and conflicting ideas. We must be careful not to curb intellectual freedom by imposing dogmatic restrictions that chill teachers from adopting the pedagogical methods they believe are most effective.” The court also states that “teachers must be sensitive to students’ personal beliefs and take care not to abuse their positions of authority,” and “teachers must also be given leeway to challenge students to foster critical thinking skills and develop their analytical abilities.”

In a recent case, a federal judge in California dismissed a lawsuit against the Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Consortia (LESMC) that plaintiffs claimed was discriminatory based on its inclusion of Palestine.

<sup>1</sup> *Keyishian v. Board of Regents (1967)*

# Know Your Rights

*Continued.*

According to Judge Olguin, “Students have a right to receive information”, and “lawsuit threatening to attach a civil liability on the basis of the assignment of [curricular material] would severely restrict a student’s right to receive material that their school board or other educational authority determines to be of legitimate educational value.” Additionally the judge asserted in their ruling that:

- “it is far from clear that learning about Israel and Palestine or encountering teaching materials with which one disagrees constitutes an injury... In other words, the individual plaintiffs’ potential exposure to ideas with which they disagree is insufficient to support standing.”
- “The freedom to receive ideas, and its relation to the freedom of expression, is particularly relevant in the classroom setting.”
- “It would be of great concern for the educational project and for academic freedom if every offended party could sue every time they did not like a curriculum or the way it was taught.”

# Know Your Rights

*Continued.*

In summary, there are a number of long standing and recent legal precedents that protect and reaffirm the rights of educators and students to academic freedom, particularly the freedom to learn and teach about Palestine. While the law can always be argued, it is imperative for administrators and education leaders to take a courageous stand, especially in times of great repression, to ensure that students have access to a comprehensive educational experience, free from biased anti-Palestinian censorship, that bolsters their ability to analyze and assess the world around them through a critical lens in order to form their own viewpoints and opinions.

# Know Your Rights Resources:

[Know Your Rights: Free Speech Rights of Public School Teachers in California](#)

[Your Rights to Free Speech in Public Schools](#)

[Palestine Legal](#)

[Guidance to U.S. Employees in Response to Anti-Palestinian Rhetoric in the Workplace](#)

[Teaching While Muslim: Educators Know Your Rights \(Slides\)](#)

[Toolkit to Defend K-12 Educators and Librarians Against False Accusations of Antisemitism](#)

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