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Realizing a Vision: The "Teaching Palestine Toolkit"

Elevating Islamic Education through ISLA's Teaching Palestine Toolkit

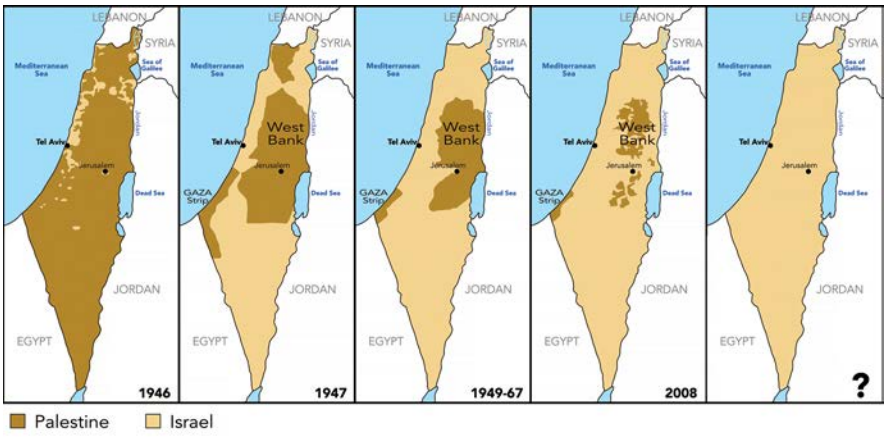
BY SAMAR MAJAIDEH

CREATING THE "TEACHING Palestine Toolkit," which explores Palestine's history through Islamic values and principles, has been an incredibly fulfilling journey. The goal was to develop an innovative educational resource that deeply engages educators and learners with this land's history and culture. Rooted in Islamic values and principles, it's designed to surpass traditional educational methods by offering a comprehensive and meaningful exploration of the Palestinian narrative.

The ongoing genocide in Gaza has moved millions of Muslims and compassionate individuals worldwide to show solidarity and support for Palestine. We have an *amana* (trust) to expose propaganda and disinformation, counter mainstream media narratives, and correct educational texts. Being originally from Gaza, I feel an added layer of responsibility and a deep connection to this project based on the transformative power of education. It's a privilege to spearhead this initiative, dedicating my expertise and energy to bring it to life and promote it within Islamic educational institutions for implementation and continuous improvement.

Although the toolkit is still in the research phase, its projects and programs are guided by rigorous research. The focus is on ensuring that it meets K-12 classrooms' unique needs and bridges the gap between research and practical application. By thoroughly understanding the educational environment and integrating feedback from both educators and learners, we aim to create an impactful and relevant resource.

This project is part of a broader initiative to capture and teach about various pain points and oppression situations within the ummah and beyond. The Islamic Schools League of America (ISLA) began with Palestine due to its profound significance in Islam and to Muslims, its over 75-year-long struggle, and the historic pattern of imperial and colonial forces attempting to control it, from the Crusaders to the present day. This toolkit aims to honor Palestine's enduring legacy and bring its rich history and current realities into the educational discourse.



One of its main objectives is to strengthen Muslim students' faith and identity and revive a sense of ummatic connection, underscoring the principle that if one part of the ummah bleeds, we all bleed. By sharing stories that exemplify perseverance, courage, and contentment with God's decree, we remind students of the sacrifices made by the Companions. These narratives serve as powerful teaching moments for educators to utilize in their classrooms.

Each of us can show support while witnessing the ongoing heart-wrenching atrocities and fight feeling helpless. Everyone has a role to play and needs to be creative and strategic in activating it to stand on the right side of history.

It's a privilege to lead this effort, knowing that each small step in education can contribute to a larger movement toward justice and understanding. Together, we can leverage our collective skills and resources to create a profound impact by ensuring that Palestine's story is told with the depth, respect, and authenticity it deserves. This toolkit is not just an educational resource; it is a testament to our commitment to truth, solidarity, and the relentless pursuit of justice.

VISION AND MISSION

The vision is to elevate Islamic education by using Palestine's history and its significance in Islam as a central case study. It aims to interweave core Islamic values, among them justice, perseverance, and dignity, thereby strengthening students' faith, identity, and connection to the global ummah.

Its mission is to give educators a well-founded collection of resources for teaching about Palestine's past and present, grounded in an Islamic worldview. This underscores the importance of an informative and transformative educational approach to create a more informed, empathetic, and socially responsible generation.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The toolkit's guiding principles ensure that the educational material is both comprehensive and deeply impactful. These principles include:

- *Justice.* Emphasizing fairness and equity in understanding Palestine's historical and current realities.
- *Perseverance.* Highlighting the Palestinians' resilience in the face of adversity to teach students the importance of steadfastness and endurance, reflecting on the struggle's spirit, and encouraging the learners' own resilience.
- *Dignity.* Upholding the respect and

honor of *all* individuals involved in the Palestinian narrative. This fosters empathy and respect for *all* people.

- *Empathy and Compassion.* Cultivating empathy and compassion by presenting the human stories behind the Palestinian struggle so students can understand the Palestinians' lived experiences.
- *Critical Thinking and Inquiry.* Encouraging students to engage critically with the material, question sources, and explore different perspectives to develop analytical skills.

COMPREHENSIVE COMPONENTS

The "Teaching Palestine Toolkit" is built on research and curation, resource evaluation and integration, and training and dissemination.

- *Research and Curation.* We prioritized conducting thorough research and learning the stakeholders' insights. Focus groups with middle and high school teachers revealed their views and if they had integrated it into their classrooms, their plans to do so soon, and the expected challenges and limitations.

Interviews with principals and school heads, as well as a gap analysis, gave us some insight into making the toolkit effective and relevant. Consulting seasoned educators, Islamic school leaders, and those directly affected by the Palestinian struggle enables the toolkit to provide a well-rounded educational experience.

The curation process involved carefully selecting and organizing these resources to create a rich content. The research component involved a thorough process of gathering comprehensive and accurate resources.

- *Resource Evaluation and Integration.* The gathered resources were subjected to a thorough evaluation process to ensure they aligned with educational standards and met the stakeholders' needs. This involved organizing the materials logically and making them accessible and relevant for classroom use. The goal was to create a seamless experience for educators so they could easily integrate the materials into their teaching.

The toolkit includes interactive maps that show the historical changes in Palestinian territories, video interviews with Palestinian families sharing their personal stories, and detailed lesson plans that align with educational standards for history and social studies classes.

The integration process also involved ensuring that the resources were structured in a way that encourages critical thinking, empathy, and a commitment to social justice.

Together, we can leverage our collective skills and resources to create a profound impact by ensuring that Palestine's story is told with the depth, respect, and authenticity it deserves. This toolkit is not just an educational resource; it is a testament to our commitment to truth, solidarity, and the relentless pursuit of justice.

By presenting the materials in an engaging and user-friendly manner, the toolkit fosters a deeper understanding of Palestine's historical and current issues.

- *Training and Dissemination.* To maximize the toolkit's impact, educators received comprehensive training and ongoing support in the form of relevant workshops, webinars, and interactive sessions. They practiced facilitating discussions about sensitive topics related to Palestine and participated in interactive webinars on using the included digital tools to create engaging lessons.

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

The toolkit's underlying philosophy provides an educational experience that is both informative and transformative. It encourages participants to explore the intersections of history, culture, religion, and socio-political dynamics, thereby fostering a comprehensive understanding of the Palestinian narrative.

By addressing the participants' emotional well-being, this holistic approach promotes a balanced approach to sensitive subjects, thereby enabling users to navigate emotional landscapes and acknowledge the human aspect of the Palestinian experience.

A lesson plan might include students analyzing primary sources, such as letters and diaries from Palestinians, to understand their personal experiences. This could be followed by a reflective exercise of discussing how these stories make them feel and how they can support justice and peace.

The "Teaching Palestine Toolkit" shows that understanding Palestine's complex issues requires a holistic, empathetic approach rooted in justice and understanding. It is designed to enlighten, engage, and empower users to acquire a nuanced understanding of Palestine and instill core Islamic values. Through this toolkit, educators can nurture informed, empathetic, and socially responsible students who are deeply connected to their faith and committed to global justice.

Our well-researched, carefully curated collection of resources aims to fill educational gaps, counter misinformation, and provide a comprehensive view of Palestine. This transformative educational journey stands as a powerful tool for educators, opening their students' minds and hearts and empowering them to advocate for justice and peace.

Imagine a classroom in which students use the toolkit to create a multimedia project that showcases Palestine's history and culture — maybe creating a digital timeline of key historical events, producing a short documentary featuring interviews with Palestinians, and organizing a community event to share their findings. Such activities not only deepen their understanding of the subject, but also foster a sense of connection and responsibility toward global issues.

The "Teaching Palestine Toolkit" embodies a vision of education that is dynamic and deeply rooted in Islamic values. It serves as a comprehensive resource for educators seeking to provide their students with a rich, informed, and compassionate understanding of Palestine, its people, and its significance in the broader context of Islamic and global history. Through this toolkit, educators are empowered to inspire their students to become advocates for justice, peace, and understanding in an interconnected world. ih

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