

GIS: Palestine: A House divided

Summary

Students will explore a key 20th century boundary decision, the partition of Palestine by the United Nations in 1947. In the lesson, they will role-play membership in a special U.N. commission established to determine boundaries for a Jewish state and an Arab state in the former British Mandate of Palestine. The students must consider a number of variables in making boundary decisions. These include Jewish and Arab population distribution, location of Jewish-owned land, physiographic features, and climate.

Time Frame

3 class periods of 45 minutes each

Materials

A House Divided Transparency
Student handouts from this lesson to be copied:
A House Divided Activity Sheets
GIS Investigation Sheets

Intended Learning Outcomes

The student is able to:

Describe the physical landscape of Palestine including patterns of rainfall and vegetation.

Identify changes in the distribution of population and land ownership in Palestine between 1880 and 1947.

Compare the merits and problems of different schemes for dividing Palestine to create a Jewish and an Arab state in 1947.

Instructional Procedures

Introduce the lesson by referring to current news regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict. Explain to students that this is a long-standing confrontation between two groups of people stemming from a single irresolvable issue; both groups consider the same physical area on earth's surface – Palestine - to be their homeland. In this lesson, they will focus on one historic milestone in the Arab-Israeli conflict – the Partition of Palestine by the United Nations in 1947.

Divide the students into groups of three or four. Distribute copies of the student activity sheet, A House Divided. Challenge each group to use the table and maps on this sheet to identify and list changes that took place in Palestine between 1880 and 1947. After five minutes, use the transparency to record and discuss each group's list.

Student observations should include the following:

Prior to World War I, Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire .

After World War I, Palestine was part of a British mandate

Between 1880 and 1947, both the Jewish and Palestinian population increased, but the Jewish population grew at a faster rate. The biggest increase in the Jewish population occurred between 1922 and 1936 - the Jewish population quadrupled while the Arab population grew by a little less than 50%. Between 1936 and 1947, the Jewish population doubled again while Arab population increased by about 30%.

Jewish land ownership grew from 3% to 7% in the 30 years from 1917 to 1947. Make sure students understand that this does not mean the Palestinian Arabs owned the remaining land. Much of Palestine is desert and was not claimed by any group.

Note: The purpose of this lesson is to focus on the U.N.'s boundary decision in 1947. You may want to include background information on Zionism and the Balfour Declaration if your students are not familiar with these terms. If you would like to add further historical background, use the data on the student activity sheet to highlight historical developments in the period. These include the role of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, the 1920 San Remo Agreement, the rise of Nazi Germany in the 1930's, and World War II, among others.

Student Activity:

Distribute the GIS activity sheets to the students. Explain that in this activity, they will assume the role of a member of the U.N. commission charged with dividing Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state in 1947. They will use GIS to observe and analyze key cultural and physiographic data in the region in order to determine boundaries for the new states. The investigation sheets will provide them with detailed instructions for their analysis.

In addition to detailed instructions, the handout includes questions to help students focus on key issues. Some questions will have specific answers, while others call for speculation and will have a range of possible responses. In addition, answers to many questions will vary with student knowledge of Middle Eastern history. An answer key to questions in the GIS activity is located at the end of this lesson.

Things to look for while the students are working on this activity:

- Are the students using a variety of GIS tools?

- Are the students answering the questions as they work through the procedure?

- Are students considering both human and physical characteristics of Palestine in making their boundary decisions?

Teacher Tip:

The end of Step 6 is a good place to pause the GIS activity until the next day. At that point, students have seen all of the data and have the information they need to decide how they will divide Palestine. Students may proceed to Step 7 after they've decided where they will make the boundaries.

Step 7 asks students to create two new themes (Jewish.shp and Arab.shp). You must determine where they should save these new themes.

Conclusion:

Each student pair will present a map of their partition plan to the class and explain the reasoning behind their decision. The lesson calls for the map to be presented as a printed ArcView layout, but teachers could also ask students to trace their plan onto a transparency if that procedure is preferred. Upon completion of the reports, conduct a class discussion comparing similarities and differences among the plans.

- Ask students to identify potential problems and advantages associated with various approaches to partition.

- Ask students to identify the part of the task that was the most difficult for them and explain why this was the case.

- Use this discussion as a forum to elaborate on the value of using geography's spatial perspective to interpret the past.

As a final component to the lesson, you should show students what the current boundaries are in Palestine. Use a projection device to display palestine.apr and add the cntry00.shp to the project. It is located in the Palestine Data directory.

Extensions

- Explore other potential issues in the partition decision by adding themes reflecting physical and cultural variables such as natural resources or sites of religious and historic significance.

- Assign students to conduct research on the Arab and Jewish responses to the U.N. decision.

- Assign students to use the Internet to locate maps of this region in the period from 1948 to the

present.

Assessment Plan

NOTE: In the following assessments, students will compare their partition plan to the one proposed by the United Nations. A map of the U.N. plan is located in the Palestine Data directory in a sub-directory called 1947.

Middle School: *Highlights skills appropriate to grades 5 through 8.*

In the middle school assessment, students will use the ArcView project to review and analyze the actual plan proposed by the U.N. in 1947 and compare it to their own plan. Assuming the role of members of the U.N. committee that designed the partition plan, students will prepare a report summarizing the following information:

What are the physical characteristics of the land that was to become part of the Jewish and Arab states?

What are the relative advantages of the U.N. partition plan?

What are the potential problems of the U.N. plan?

High School: *Highlights skills appropriate to grades 9 through 12.*

In the high school assessment, students will use the ArcView project to review and analyze the actual plan proposed by the U.N. and compare it to their own plan. Assuming the role of a Palestinian Jew or a Palestinian Arab, students will prepare a report summarizing their point of view about the following questions:

What are the physical characteristics of the land that was to become part of the Jewish and Arab states?

What are the relative advantages of the U.N. partition plan?

What are the potential problems of the U.N. plan?

As a final component to the lesson, show students what the current boundaries are in Palestine . Use a projection device to display palestine.apr and add the cntry00.shp to the project. It is located in the Palestine Data directory.

Bibliography

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