

CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

SOURCE, ORIGIN, AUTHOR, PURPOSE, SIGNIFICANCE (SOAPS)

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

How to Analyze a Document

Documents shed light on moments and events in history. They provide specific information or give a broad description. They give us a unique glimpse into the past, which secondary sources cannot provide. Reading several documents from the same time frame that stretch over a period of time, allows the reader to see a context for an evolving idea, theme, or undertaking. Similarly, reading several documents from the exact same time, but with differing origins, allows a tapestry to be woven of that moment. The reader should consider answering the: **who, what, where, when, why, and how** questions that contribute to the writing and interpretation of the text or document under review.

1. What is the **origin** of the document? Is it authentic? How does the type of document present the information? Is the material authentic? What is the **source** of the material? What was the **purpose** of the document? If a prescription for action or report, what action or inaction followed what was written?
2. Who composed the document and for whom was it intended? What is the relationship between the **author** (s) and the recipient(s) and how does this affect content, phraseology and tone? How does the document impact other readers, who are not part of the targeted recipients? Why would a document be interpreted differently by different audiences?
3. What is the historical context? How do events or circumstances leading up to the document affect its creation? What is the **significance** of the document at this time? Does the document stand alone, or is it part of a series of documents (an exchange of letters, a phase in negotiations, etc.), and how does this affect its content, phraseology and tone?
4. What is the content and how is it presented? Specifically, how does the document begin and end, what are its main points? What can be inferred from specific words or phrases used (or omitted)? What can one deduce about the author's (or recipients') views, intentions and interests? Why, specifically, in some diplomatic documents, are phrases and words ambiguous or certain words omitted?
5. Why was the document **significant**? Who did it impact? When was it made public, if at all? Who knew about the document when it was written? If private or secret, who did not know about its contents at the time? What does that mean for that moment in history if there are parties to a conflict and they do not know what was really going on in an adversary's plans or mind? Were new terms coined or ideas introduced? How did others react to the document's publication? How has the meaning of the document changed over time?

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES
CASE LEARNING ACTIVITY
THE BALFOUR DECLARATION, 1917

LESSON OVERVIEW

In seeking official government endorsement for the Zionist cause from a great power, the leadership of the Zionist Organization was successful in getting such an endorsement from the British government in 1917 in the form of a letter from the British foreign secretary Arthur Balfour to Lord Rothschild, the head of the British Zionist Organization.

The Balfour Declaration provided great excitement for the Zionist leaders and provided hope towards the establishment of a Jewish State. The Declaration also provided consternation to Arab leadership who had their own vision of political leadership in the region. In 1922, the contents of the Balfour Declaration are ratified by the League of Nations in the preamble of the Articles for the Palestine Mandate.

This lesson will integrate analyzing the Balfour Declaration with role play activities to give students' greater understanding of the impact that the Declaration had on both the Zionist and Arab leadership at the time.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

The contents of the 1917 Balfour Declaration became central to the international recognition of the right of Jews to establish a national home/state.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What was Britain's interest in granting the Declaration?
- Why was it in the interest of the Zionists to receive permission or acknowledgment to build a national home?
- What was the reaction of the Zionists, Arabs, and World community to the Declaration?
- Why was it necessary to protect the "rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country?"

OBJECTIVES:

Students will:

- Interpret the Balfour Declaration within a historical context
- Be able to articulate why the British granted the Declaration and understand its inclusion in the 1922 Articles for the Palestine Mandate
- Evaluate, articulate, and analyze the responses and actions of affected constituents

TIME RECOMMENDED:

3 45 Minute Sessions

GRADE LEVEL:

Middle School/High School

ASSESSMENT:

Students will participate in a role play activity in two groups: The Zionist Leadership and The Arab leadership in Palestine. Each group will discuss their reactions to the Declaration and then write a response to the British.

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES
CASE LEARNING ACTIVITY
THE BALFOUR DECLARATION, 1917

ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES:

Activity One: Setting the Scene

1. Begin with a discussion of what was needed during the period before and during World War I in order for the Zionists to achieve a state. **What strategies do students think should have been focused and developed?** This can also be done as a role play, by convening the students into a leadership meeting of the World Zionist Organization to outline their strategic plans in lieu of the events of the war in 1915.
2. As a secondary discussion or combined with the role play activity, conduct a discussion on what Britain's approach should be to the Middle East in lieu of the events of the war in 1915? **What strategies should the British be undertaking at this time in order to advance and protect their interests in the region and beyond?**

As in step one, this can also be done as a role play, by breaking students into two groups, one Zionist group of leaders as described above, and a second group of the British cabinet. This activity could be extended to include role play of German, Russian, French, American, Arab and Ottoman interests as well.

Each group can then develop a strategy or position paper on how they are going to move forward in achieving their goals/advancing their interests which they will present to the class. **Discuss: Where does each position overlap? Seem in conflict with each other? How do students hypothesize that each group will "get what it wants?"**
3. If necessary review some of the background of WWI and the causes, including: who fought on which side and why, the colonial control of specific regions by European and other States and how that impacted the interests of those nations, the rise and development of nationalism and efforts towards self-determination before and during the war.
4. **Digging Deeper:** What was the historical context of Jews negotiating with powerful leaders to assure their rights?

Throughout the great majority of Jewish history, wherever Jews lived, they lived as a minority. They were therefore susceptible to degradation and abuse by a variety of local officials or religious leaders. In order to survive a precarious existence, Jewish leaders often negotiated agreements to assure a measure of security, even if temporary. Jews fashioned written and unwritten understandings in order to survive, essentially to buy time. The first Zionist leader, Theodor Herzl, in 1903 sought but failed to gain permission from the Ottoman Sultan for Jews to immigrate to Palestine. Negotiating the Balfour Declaration was in keeping with the perennial Jewish effort to find security. Working with the British and ultimately under British protection was a major positive shift in the insurance of Jewish life and security. **What were some other examples of Jews negotiating with larger powers?**

Additional Resources for this activity on www.israeled.org

Read [Dr. Ken Stein's analysis](#) of the Balfour Declaration and its historical significance

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

CASE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Activity Two: Text Study of the Balfour Declaration

1. Divide students into small groups and distribute the text of the [Balfour Declaration](#). Using the guidelines for analyzing a primary source document as outlined above, have students answer the five major questions in their groups. In addition, either as a discussion after the analysis or as part of it, you may want to include any or all of the following:

Questions to clarify in understanding the Balfour Declaration

- a. Did Britain have the right to grant the Balfour Declaration? Would Britain have granted the promise to the Jews as a people if the, if the British did not have a strategic interest in the eastern Mediterranean?
- b. Other than strategic motivations, what other factors might there have been for Britain to grant the Declaration? (Fear of another country supporting the Zionist undertaking, reward to Chaim Weitzmann for some reason, a philosophical commitment among some in Great Britain to finally give Jews a chance to control their own destiny) Can you discuss how the Zionists tried to encourage Russian, German, and even US interest in trying to support a Jewish entity in Palestine?
- c. Why was it important for the Zionists to have the Declaration approved by the British cabinet? What did it mean for the Zionists to have Great Britain's recognition
- d. What do you suppose was meant by the term, "use its best endeavors?"
- e. What rights of the non-Jewish communities in Palestine were not to be prejudiced? (civil and religious)? What rights were not stipulated here for not being prejudiced (political)
- f. Why was it necessary to protect the "rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country?" What is dual-loyalty? Among the most prominent English Jews who were anti-Zionist or non-Zionists, such as Edwin Montagu, Claude Montefiore, or Leonard Cohen. What view did they represent in distinction with Weizmann, Nordau, and Samuel?

Additional Resources for this activity on www.israeled.org

- a. You may want to have students look and examine the maps, "[The Middle East Circa 1914](#)," and "[Palestine and Syria, 1915](#)" which contain brief introductions that provide background to the geopolitical structure of the region at that time.
- b. In addition, you may want to have students look at the Husayn-McMahon Correspondence of 1915 and the [Sykes-Picot Agreement](#) of 1916. *What were the British interests in the region at this time?*

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

CASE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Activity Three: Assessment

1. Student groups will participate in a role play to formulate an official response to the Balfour Declaration of 1917. The response can either be done as a written assignment, journal entry, blog entry (even though there were no blogs in 1917!) or as a radio/television interview.
2. For an expanded activity, you can have students also formulate responses to the Declaration in 1917, 1922 (after the drafting of the preamble to the Articles of Mandate for Palestine and US Congress endorsement of the Declaration), 1939, and 1948. The expanded activity can also include reactions/responses from other nations/groups including the British and Americans.
3. **Expanded Activity** - On July 24, 1922, the League of Nations approved the [British Mandate for the administration of the territory of Palestine](#). Included in the preamble was the text of the Balfour Declaration, giving political legitimacy and international recognition to the Zionist cause. When first sent as a letter, the Balfour Declaration had no international recognition. When it became a portion of the League of Nations Mandate Articles for Palestine, it derived international legitimacy. **How so? Why was that important for the Zionists? What had Herzl not received from the Ottoman Sultan, a charter to do what?**