

Telling the Story



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Telling the story:
The Four Genres of Zionist History

This lesson explores the nature of historical narrative: the ways in which we interpret historical events. We will learn a four-genre model of literary style, and use this model to look at the key events from Zionist history through 4 different different prisms.

Goals:

- The students will be challenged to ascribe **multiple interpretations** to events in Zionist history
- The students will be exposed to the **multi-voiced** nature of interpreting historical events
- The students, with their newly acquired perspective on Israel's history, will understand both the **wonder**, and the **complexity** of Israel's reality
- The students will learn about some of the key events in **Zionist history**
- The students will learn **Frye's 4-genre model** of literature

Outline of the activity:

Stage 1: Introduction:

In the first stage of this lesson, the teacher will introduce Northrop Frye's literary model to the class

Stage 2: Creating:

In the second stage of the lesson, the students will be divided into groups and assigned a genre. They will have to write a skit telling the Jewish Zionist story through the lens of their genre.

Stage 3: Performance:

In the third stage, the students will perform their skits

Stage 4: Discussion:

In the fourth stage, the students will analyze the performances they saw, and begin to appreciate the need for all four genres

Stage 5: Revision:

In the fifth stage, the stories will be edited, revised, etc. to include elements from each genre

Stage 6: Performance:

Finally, in the last stage, the re-worked skits will be performed

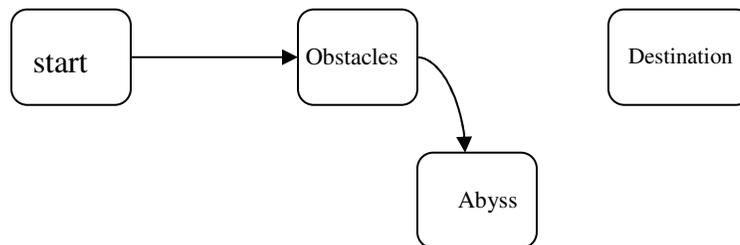
Background Information:

Northrop Frye, the Canadian literary critic, divided up literature into four basic genres: romance, tragedy, irony, and comedy. For our purposes, so as not to get de-railed by the connotations of each genre, we have renamed the genres as follows.

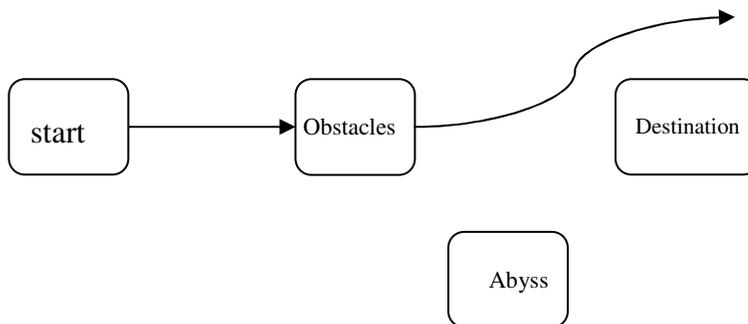
1. **Adventure (romance)**, in which the protagonist as the hero sets out on a journey, encounters obstacles and manages to overcome them.



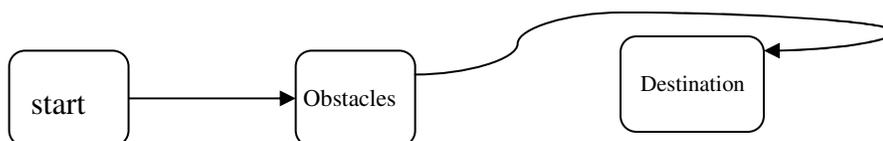
2. **Misadventure (tragedy)**, in which the protagonist sets out on a journey, encounters obstacles but is unable to overcome them. Instead, the hero falls in the abyss, never to reach his destination.



3. **Alternative adventure (irony)**, in which the protagonist sets out on a journey according to a preconceived route, encounters an obstacle, manages to overcome them, only to get hopelessly lost. The hero never makes it to his destination, yet he also does not fall into the abyss.



4. **Merry-go-round (comedy)**, in which the protagonist sets off on his journey, encounters an obstacle, overcomes it. Hopelessly, and via a circuitous, unplanned route, manages to reach his destination.



Rationale:

The premise of this activity is that Jewish history, and the narrative of Zionism, have all-to-often been taught in a black-and-white manner, typically choosing to stick to either “romance” or “tragedy” narratives. Either the Jewish people have been tragically victimized, wondering hopelessly for century after century. Or, the Jewish story has been victorious and triumphant in declaring national autonomy after a two thousand year-long journey(!).

It is our belief that a true, sophisticated understanding of the Jewish narrative reveals that there is a strong need for other narratives to be given voice as well. It is not that the Jewish narrative has not included romance or tragedy, it certainly has, but that is not the entire story.

We also would like to show that the same series of events can be interpreted, or even manipulated, to convey drastically different messages, accomplish different goals, etc. This is not a bad thing, this is merely the nature of history and story-telling.

In this activity, we challenge the students to organize a series of events, using drama and art, through the various lenses. **We challenge them to integrate all four voices, and walk away with a multi-voiced narrative that comprises elements of each perspective.**

Activity:

Needed: 4 facilitators to guide discussions, and the printed materials provided in the appendix

Stage 1: Introduction

Introduce the activity and to Northrop Frye’s 4-genre model to the students based on the background information provided above.

Stage 2: Genre Groups

Divide the students into 4 groups. Give each group one of the four genres, so that all four genres are assigned.

Give each group 2 cards:

1. an explanation of their genre (Appendix I)
2. a list of 10 key events in Zionist history (Appendix II)

The assignment is simple:

Each group must write and perform a 5-minute skit that tells the story of the Key Events (they must use at least 7 of the 10 events, but are encouraged to use all 10) in the style and tone of the genre they were assigned. Emphasize that the purpose of the genre is not for them to ignore or leave out the events that don’t seem to fit into their category. The genre is there to instruct the **style** and form that the *interpretation*, or *telling* of the story takes on.

Make sure every member of the group is involved in the performance.

We recommend walking around and consulting with each group to make sure they grasp the basic assignment.

Give them about 15 minutes to prepare their presentations.

Stage 3: Performances

Have each genre group perform their 5-minute skit in front of the other groups.

Stage 4: Discussion

Re-divide the students into 4 new groups using the **jigsaw strategy**: make sure each new group has a proportionate representation of members from each of the original genre-specific groups (i.e. each of the new groups needs to contain members from the adventure, misadventure, alternative adventure, and merry-go-round groups)

Lead a discussion about the performances they experienced. Here are a few suggested **guiding questions**:

- Which story styles did you prefer to watch?
- Which are the easier styles/genres to portray? Which are the more challenging/complex to portray?
 - Why?
- Which events were left out, and by which groups?
 - Why do you think those groups had a difficult time including those events in their narrative?
- Which telling of the story seems to you to be the most honest or realistic?

Guide the conversation such that the students begin to see that perhaps the fullest telling of a story occurs when elements from each of the genres is incorporated

EXAMPLE:

In order to clarify the exercise, we've included the following example, where we translated one historical event in all 4 different styles. Consider reading this to the class, so that they too can have an understanding of how one event can be seen in four lights.

On May 14th, 1948, the State of Israel was formally declared. The next day, seven Arab armies invaded and the Israel Independence War was fought, ending with Israel's victory and independence. Here's a look at the declaration of Israel's statehood event through all 4 lenses:

Adventure/Romance:

For Jews all over the world, who were still reeling from the horrors of the Holocaust, the story of Israel's establishment was nothing short of an **adventure/romance**. After two thousand years of being victims, oppression, and wandering from place to place, the Jews had *finally* established a home for themselves. The Jewish story, epic and wrought with countless obstacles, had a happy ending, with the Jews finally reaching their destination: their homeland.

Misadventure/Tragedy:

Six million Jews had already perished in the Holocaust and Israel could do nothing to prevent it. The State should have been declared ten years earlier. We may have won the Independence War, but at what cost? The war was bloody and destructive, thousands of men and women killed. And what for? The Jewish people woke up the day after the State was declared only to realize they'd be fighting forever, both physical/military battles, as well as ideologically and identity battles.

Alternative Adventure/Irony:

Herzl envisioned a European-style Jewish State, where German was the spoken language and Western Culture was pervasive. But Europeans did not move to Israel en masse, and instead Zionism turned to the Jews of Sephardic decent. Herzl imagined the role of the Rabbi in the synagogue, but instead he is in politics. Herzlians would not recognize the end product of Zionism that is Israel today. Orthodox readers of the Bible with its promises of Return to Zion would most likely not recognize modern Israel either.

Merry-Go-Round/Comedy:

No people has been tossed around by fate more so than the Jews. Our history has held one unexpected challenge after the other. Somehow, and despite all odds, we made it through each challenge, scarred and dirtied, but alive. Now we've finally come home, though we're barely sure of how we got here. We surely never thought it would take all this to get our own State, but hey, we're here, and here to stay.

Stage 5: Revision and Conclusion

The final stage of the activity is a continuation of Stage 4 (above). Having discussed the main points covered in the "guiding points" above (in stage 4), together, the jigsaw group of students are presented with their final challenge. Ask them: **how can we re-write, revise, or re-tell the**

“story” of the 10-key events (without excluding any of them), **to include elements from each of the 4 genres?**

Have the students re-write and re-design their original stories. Make sure that each genre receives some attention in the final product.

Performing the revised narratives is recommended, but not necessary, so gauge your time constraints and attention spans and decide accordingly. The activity can end with each discussion group having re-written the story, without seeing the other groups’ performances. The bottom line is the process, so if they get as far as completing the revision, the message will have come across.

Appendix I: Genre Cards

Stories can be told in different styles, with different themes, atmospheres, and tones. Your assignment is to perform a 5-minute skit, telling the story of the “Key Events from Zionist history” in a particular genre, or tone.

We don’t expect you to use your genre to *change* what actually happened, but rather as a guide for **how** to tell the story (example: does your story feel dark and stormy, or light and fluffy?)

You must use at least 7 of the 10 Key Events in your performance.

(You can add an event if you feel we missed something important)

You may choose to emphasize certain events over others.

Your Story Style: Adventure

In an adventure-style story, the protagonist, or lead character sets out on a journey, encounters obstacles but manages to overcome them and successfully reaches the destination. It’s an exciting story with a happy ending! It’s not always an easy victory, but the good guy wins in the end.

A helpful note: “after 2,000 years, the Jewish People has finally achieved what they have been longing for all along!”

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Your Story Style: Misadventure

In a misadventure, the protagonist or main character sets out on a journey, encounters obstacles, puts up a fight, but is unfortunately unable to overcome them. In a misadventure story, the hero falls into the abyss, never to reach his destination and all is lost. This is kind of a tragic story, because the good guy doesn’t win.

A helpful note: “after centuries of oppression and being victims, we are *still* uncertain of our future, and Jews are still giving their lives”

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Your Story Style: Alternative adventure

In an alternative adventure, or irony, the protagonist or main character sets out on a journey with a specific, planned route that will take him (or her) to the destination. However, on the way they encounter an obstacle. With great effort, the hero is able to overcome the obstacle, only to get hopelessly lost. The hero never makes it to his original destination, but he gets somewhere...just not where he intended to. This story is not a happy ending, but not a sad one either.

A helpful note: “Herzl dreamed of a perfect country for the Jews- is this really what he had in mind?”

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You may choose to emphasize certain events over others.

Your Story Style: Merry-go-round

In a Merry-go-round story, the protagonist or main character sets off on a journey with a planned route to get to a destination. On the way, this “hero” encounters an obstacle, fights, and is able to overcome it. However, the original route/way to get to the destination is lost. Somehow, the character finds a round-about, spontaneous way of reaching the final destination. In the end, the protagonist makes it to the finish line, but from a difference angle than planned.

A helpful note: “No People have had more obstacles than the Jews, and yet we’ve still managed to survive and flourish!”

Appendix II: Key events in Zionist history card

For Teachers:

Here's some more information on each event, feel free to decide how much you want to give over to your students, taking into account whether or not they have prior familiarity with Zionist history.

10+ Key Events in Zionist History: An annotated list

1. 1897: First Zionist Congress

Called by Theodor Herzl as a Parliament for those in sympathy with the implementation of Zionist goals, the congress included some 200 participants from 17 countries.

The main items on the agenda were the presentation of Herzl's plans, the establishment of the World Zionist Organization and the declaration of Zionism's goals-the Basel program.

"Zionism seeks to establish a home for the Jewish people in Eretz Israel secured under public law. The Congress contemplates the following means to the attainment of this end:

1. The promotion by appropriate means of the settlement in Eretz-Israel of Jewish farmers, artisans, and manufacturers.
2. The organization and uniting of the whole of Jewry by means of appropriate institutions, both local and international, in accordance with the laws of each country.
3. The strengthening and fostering of Jewish national sentiment and national consciousness.
4. Preparatory steps toward obtaining the consent of governments, where necessary, in order to reach the goals of Zionism."

At the Congress, Herzl was elected President of the Zionist Organization and Max Nordau one of three Vice-Presidents. HaTikva was established as the official anthem of the Zionist Organization. Thereafter, the Zionist Congress met every year (1897-1901), then every second year (1903-1913, 1921-1939). Since the Second World War, meetings have been held approximately every four years.

2. 1905: the 7th Zionist Congress

At the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903, Herzl proposed the British Uganda Program as a temporary refuge for Jews in Russia in immediate danger. By a vote of 295-178 it was decided to send an expedition ("investigatory commission") to examine the territory proposed.

While Herzl made it clear that this program would not affect the ultimate aim of Zionism, a Jewish entity in the Land of Israel, the proposal aroused a storm at the Congress and nearly led to a split in the Zionist movement. The Jewish Territorialist Organization (ITO) was formed as a

result of the unification of various groups who had supported Herzl's Uganda proposals during the period 1903-1905.

The Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905 opened with a eulogy on Herzl by Nordau. The Congress heard the report of the Commission that had been sent to East Africa which had concluded that "Uganda" was unsuitable for mass Jewish settlement and proceeded to vote against a national home anywhere except Palestine and its immediate vicinity. The Uganda Program was finally rejected.

3. 1917: The Balfour Declaration,

The British government decided to endorse the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine. After discussions within the cabinet and consultations with Jewish leaders, the decision was made public in a letter from British Foreign Secretary Lord Arthur James Balfour to Lord Rothschild. The contents of this letter became known as the Balfour Declaration, including the expression of the British government in favor of "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people".

The Mandate for Palestine's purpose was to put into effect the Balfour Declaration. It specifically referred to "the historical connections of the Jewish people with Palestine" and to the moral validity of "reconstituting their National Home in that country." The term "reconstituting" shows recognition of the fact that Palestine had been the Jews' home. Furthermore, the British were instructed to "use their best endeavors to facilitate" Jewish immigration, to encourage settlement on the land and to "secure" the Jewish National Home. The word "Arab" does not appear in the Mandatory award.

The Mandate was formalized by the 52 governments at the League of Nations on July 24, 1922.

4. 1920: The Haganah is formed. The Haganah was the predecessor of the Israeli Defense Forces.

The Haganah was the underground military organization of the yishuv in Eretz Yisrael from 1920 to 1948. The Arab riots in 1920 and 1921 strengthened the view that it was impossible to depend upon the British authorities and that the yishuv needed to create an independent defense force completely free of foreign authority. In June 1920, the Haganah was founded.

The Arab riots in 1929 brought about a complete change in the Haganah's status. It became a large organization that included a comprehensive training program for its members, ran officers' training courses, etc. The Haganah established central arms depots into which a continuous stream of light arms flowed from Europe, while simultaneously, the basis was laid for the underground production of arms.

In the spring of 1947, David Ben-Gurion took it upon himself to direct the general policy of the Haganah, especially in preparation for impending Arab attack. On May 26, 1948, the Provisional Government of Israel decided to transform the Haganah into the regular army of the State, to be called “Ztava Haganah LeYisrael”—The Israel Defense Forces.

5. **1933: Adolf Hitler** is elected as chancellor of Germany

In January 1933, Adolf Hitler took the reins of the 14-year-old German democratic republic. By this time, the economic pressures of the Great Depression combined with the indecisive, self-serving nature of its elected politicians had brought government in Germany to a complete standstill. The German people were without jobs, without food, quite afraid and desperate for relief. Around noon on January 30th, Hitler was sworn in.

Within weeks, Hitler became an absolute dictator of Germany and set in motion a chain of events that resulted in the Second World War and the eventual extermination of millions.

6. **1945: World War II ends**, Nazi concentration camps are liberated

In 1945, the Allied armies liberated the concentration camps as World War 2 came to an end. Tragically, deaths in the camps continued for several weeks after liberation. Some prisoners had already become too weak to survive.

According to SS reports, there were more than 700,000 prisoners left in the camps in January 1945. It has been estimated that nearly half of the total number of concentration camp deaths between 1933 and 1945 occurred during the last year of the war.

Later calculations estimate the Jewish death toll at nearly 6 million. Roughly 3 million Jews survived and became refugees, later to settle in countries around the world, largely in Palestine and North America.

7. **1948: The State of Israel is declared** in Tel Aviv by David Ben Gurion

The United Nations Resolution 181 on November 29, 1947 called for a partition plan to divide Palestine between Jews and Arabs. The Jewish state was to receive around 56% of the land area of Mandate Palestine, encompassing 82% of the Jewish population, though it would be separated from Jerusalem, designated as an area to be administered by the UN. The plan was accepted by most of the Jewish population, but rejected by much of the Arab populace. The division was to take effect as part of a British withdrawal from the territory (to be no later than summer of 1948).

The Israeli Declaration of Independence was made on 14 May 1948 (5 Iyar 5708), the day before the British Mandate was due to expire, and was the official announcement that the new Jewish state named the State of Israel had been formally established in parts of what was

known as the British Mandate of Palestine and on land where, in antiquity, the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah had once been. The new State of Israel was invaded the very next day by seven Arab armies, and the “War of Independence” was fought.

8. 1952: Israel participates in its first Olympic Games in Helsinki, Finland.

Israel had been unable to participate in the 1948 Games because of its War of Independence. A previous Palestine Mandate team had boycotted the 1936 Games in protest of the Nazi regime. Israel competed in the Summer Olympic Games for the first time at the 1952 Summer Olympics in Helsinki, Finland.

Though Israel did not take home a medal until 1992, their participation in the Olympics is an important landmark in its history.

9. 1967: Jews gain access to the Western Wall in Jerusalem

The Six Day War fought between June 5 and June 10, 1967, by Israel and the neighboring states of Egypt [known then as the United Arab Republic (UAR)], Jordan, and Syria. The outcome was a swift and decisive Israeli victory. At the war's end, Israel took effective control of the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. The status of the territories captured by Israel during the war and the concurrent refugee problem, are central concerns in the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

With both sides of Jerusalem united, Jews could finally gain access to the Western Wall.

10.1990-91: Collapse of the Former Soviet Union, over 1 million Jews immigrate to Israel from Russia

In 1991, communism collapsed and the Soviet Union dissolved. This allowed for 1.5 million Russian Jews to freely leave the Former Soviet Union. Of those, roughly 1 million have emigrated to Israel, drastically affecting the overall population of Israel.

Ariel Sharon, in his capacity as Minister of Housing & Construction and member of the Ministerial Committee for Immigration & Absorption, launched an unprecedented large-scale construction effort to accommodate the new Russian population in Israel so as to facilitate their smooth integration and encourage further Jewish immigration as an ongoing means of increasing the Jewish population of Israel.

11. *Something missing? Add 1 event of your own!*

Allow the students to include an event they may know about and think should be on the list!

For Students:

10+ Key Events in Zionist History:

1. **1897: First Zionist Congress** in Basel, Switzerland takes place. It was attended by about 200 participants from seventeen countries. HaTikva was established as the official anthem of the Zionist Organization.
2. **1905: the 7th Zionist Congress**, at which it was decided NOT to take the **Uganda proposal** (the British proposal to grant the Jews land for a Jewish state in Uganda, as opposed to Israel)
3. **1917: The Balfour Declaration**, expressing the British government's view in favor of "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people"
4. **1920: The Haganah is formed.** The Haganah was the predecessor of the Israeli Defense Forces.
5. **1933: Adolf Hitler** is elected as chancellor of Germany
6. **1945: World War II ends**, Nazi concentration camps are liberated
7. **1948: The State of Israel is declared** in Tel Aviv by David Ben Gurion
8. **1952: Israel participates in its first Olympic Games** in Helsinki, Finland.
9. **1967: Jews gain access to the Western Wall in Jerusalem**
10. **1990-91: Collapse of the Former Soviet Union, over 1 million Jews immigrate to Israel from Russia**
11. *Something missing? Add 1 event of your own!* _____