

Curriculum walk-through: terms and overview of sessions

Note from the Facing the Nakba Coordinating Committee:

When we got together to develop this curriculum we agreed on these guiding principles:

1. It is the responsibility of American Jews to know the history of the Nakba and to make that history visible in our communities.
2. Our role as American Jews is to support and amplify Palestinian voices and experiences and not to take ownership over the Palestinian struggle for liberation.
3. We know from the history of social change that organizing for justice and equality, when powered by directly affected communities, can move mountains, even though we might not be able to imagine the possibilities beforehand.

I. General overview

The purpose of this guide is to offer background on the project and a walk-through of the curriculum, with terms, session components, and session summaries. Commonly used terms are defined and session components are explained.

II. Project overview

Facing the Nakba offers educational resources to American Jews and a general American audience about the history of the Nakba (“Catastrophe” in Arabic) and its implications in Palestine/Israel today. The Nakba refers to the forced displacement of Palestinians that began with Israel’s establishment, and that continues to this day. To that end, the team at Facing the Nakba has developed a curriculum and teaching guide about the Nakba to be taught in workshops and classrooms across the United States.

III. Rationale

Many people learn about the importance of Israel as a safe haven for Jews, a haven that was won when Israel prevailed over Arab armies in the 1948 War. Even when Israel’s human rights violations are criticized in public forums or activist and educational circles, the conversation often focuses on the post-1967 occupation, without acknowledging the dispossession and occupation that began with the founding of the state of Israel. This gap in our political discourse hinders the ability to understand the roots of cyclical violence in Palestine/Israel and to imagine a different future for both peoples based on justice and equality.

The Israeli non-governmental organization [Zochrot](#) (“Remembering” in Hebrew) has sought, since its founding in 2002, to broaden Jewish Israelis’ understanding of the events that took place in the course of creating the State of Israel. Insisting upon a history that has been largely shrouded in silence for more than sixty years, Zochrot aims to reach a contemporary Israeli society that is barely aware of the catastrophe of the Nakba and the resulting erasure of Palestinian life and culture. To this day, Zochrot’s website notes, “Physical remains continue to be destroyed, the names of Palestinian localities are missing from the map and from the

landscape, and even the memory of Palestinian life that was once here has almost no echo in Israeli public discourse.”

Because Zochrot believes that honestly reckoning with history is crucial to fashioning a just resolution for Israelis and Palestinians (including those living within Green-Line Israel; those in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza; and those in the Palestinian diaspora), a study guide was developed for educators to use with Jewish-Israeli students called “How Do You Say Nakba in Hebrew.” Facing the Nakba was inspired by this study guide and formed to adapt and develop the materials in the Zochrot curriculum for a U.S. audience. For participants who want to learn more about the Nakba, the curriculum offers an opportunity to learn about what happened in 1948, to learn about its ongoing effects, and also to understand why and how that story is elided in U.S. conversations.

As important as Zochrot’s project is for Israelis, we believe it is also important for American Jews and, indeed, for all of us in the United States. The U.S. today is Israel’s staunchest ally and financial supporter (currently over \$3 billion a year), a position buttressed by a formidable lobby consisting of both Jewish and Christian organizations and individuals. The influence of this lobby reaches deep into the halls of Congress, the mainstream media, and college campuses, venues that it polices by seeking to marginalize activists who criticize Israel—often by labeling them as anti-Semitic. In part, the power of this lobby rests on ignorance, and not only the ignorance of a vast silent majority, but also that of peace-and-justice activists whose knowledge reaches back only to the 1967 occupation. Our goal is to educate influencers, solidarity activists, and the next generation of Jewish community leaders so that, together, we may better support the Palestinian people in achieving their human rights and so that both peoples may one day live together in equality and peace.

IV. The curriculum and its potential reach

Through the generosity of Zochrot, our team has obtained copies of their Study Guide and many of their materials, translated into English, which we have used as a springboard to create this seven-unit curriculum of 90-minute class sessions. The curriculum and teaching guide are available online free of charge to educators and activists. Facing the Nakba also offers “train the trainers” workshops with our growing partner base, sharing our curriculum in different venues, and offering one-on-one support to groups implementing the curriculum.

The curriculum is intended to provide flexibility to facilitators who can choose which sessions to present and in what order and can select among the suggested activities and readings. Facilitators should take into account participants’ backgrounds and levels of knowledge of the issue in making these choices. In most sessions, we provide links to additional materials that the facilitators can use to deepen their own background, to prepare for sessions, or to recommend to participants.

V. Session summaries

Session 1: Introduction

We welcome the group, introduce participants to the sessions, and start to explore the Nakba.

Session 2: Encountering the Nakba

In this session, we help participants understand their personal relationship to the Nakba, explore why we do not know about the Nakba, and start to uncover where to look for that history through introducing the Nakba with a slideshow and a “found documents” activity using primary sources from 1948.

Session 3: The Nakba in History

Through a slideshow/presentation, we present a historical overview of the Nakba: Palestinian life before the Nakba, the relationship between Jews and Palestinians, the impact of the Nakba in numbers, the UN Partition Plan, and the various reasons Palestinians left their villages. Through small group discussions we ask the question, “how did we get here?” and develop a deeper understanding of historical context.

Session 4: Testimony

In this session, we see and hear testimonies from Palestinians describing what life was like before and during 1948. We ask what “testimony” means, and examine how we feel when we hear people tell what happened during the Nakba. We may use academic texts, concepts, and empirical research to understand testimonies, but our focus is first and foremost on the personal experience.

Session 5: In the Archives

This session includes close reading and discussion in small groups to give participants time to reflect on and work out some of the information they have encountered in the previous sessions. Close readings and examinations include: the Israeli Declaration of Independence, a testimony of a Palmach soldier, Plan Dalet, and the poems “I Belong There,” and “There Was No Farewell.” We place different versions of history in conversation with “official history,” to see where they differ and how we can interpret that conflict.

Session 6: The Right of Return

Participants transition from learning about the history of the Nakba to thinking about the ongoing effects of the Nakba. In this session, we look at who the Palestinian refugees are under international law and consider a range of views regarding how they might be included to ensure a peaceful, just resolution.

Session 7: Forms of Resistance

In this session, we reflect further on how the Nakba impacts Palestinian life now and begin to explore both art and the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement as acts of peaceful resistance in Palestine. We also reflect on the seven sessions as a whole and how we want to transform what we’ve learned into action.

VI. Definition of terms of use in curricula

Below are some commonly used directives for the Facing the Nakba curriculum:

- **Goals/ Objectives:** What the session or activity will achieve, i.e. concrete skills and resources.
- **Framing:** Used to state the purpose of the activity.
- **Talking point:** Suggested explanation of the activity.
- **Facilitator Action:** What facilitators do in the activity.
- **Participant Action:** What participants do in the activity.
- **Connection to next activity:** How the activities build from and are related to one another.
- **Facilitator note:** Extra information regarding framing, talking points and/or suggestions on how to guide the activity and/or discussion.

VII. Session components

Below are the commonly used session components, or the general sections that appear in Facing the Nakba's curriculum sessions.

Summary and Goals: A brief description of each session.

Materials: Suggested and required materials appear at the beginning of each session, and items for specific activities are re-listed with the given activity.

Welcome: Every session starts with a welcome and an icebreaker that allows participants to say something about themselves and share thoughts or feelings.

Session Activities: This is broken down into activities labeled in blue and sub-activities labeled in green.

Closing: Each session closes with participant questions or reflections.

Participant Prep for next session: Any homework or reading to prepare for the next session.

Bibliography: Books, articles, videos, and resources for the sessions to enrich one's understanding of the material.

Reflection Journal: This is not specifically marked as a session component, but is referenced throughout the sessions in different activities and discussions. The reflection journal is a space for participants to reflect, pose questions, dig deeper, etc.

Quick takeaways and facilitation challenges

Created for Facing the Nakba by [PARCEO](#)

I. Purpose of the guide

This Facilitation Guide provides practical support for creating an inclusive and welcoming learning environment. The material offers first-hand accounts that may be in conflict with what some of us have previously heard about the Nakba. We encourage critical thinking and reflection to enable participants to interact with the materials in different ways. To facilitate this process, we have created facilitator notes that 1) address possible issues/scenarios that may arise and 2) share some of our thoughts about the process of facilitation. Facing the Nakba curriculum was designed using a popular education or Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework—a pedagogy that recognizes that in this process we are all teachers *and* learners. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a framework for engaging in research and organizing for social justice that is rooted in a community’s own knowledge, wisdom, and experience. PAR recognizes that those most impacted by systemic injustice are in the best position to understand and analyze their needs and challenges and to organize for social change. This framework is helpful for Facing the Nakba facilitation, because it allows for participatory and experiential engagement with the material and with each other during the workshop sessions.

II. Goals of PAR-based facilitation

Facilitation is a tool used to guide, support and move a process forward. Facilitation through a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework is very reflective, intentional and participatory, ensuring that all voices are heard. Below are a few guiding principles that are helpful to keep in mind when facilitating within this framework.

- Foster an environment to build healthy, respectful relationships by developing clear goals and establishing the group’s purpose together.
- Recognize who is in the room and remain conscious of issues of power, dynamics, different forms of expression so that all types of participation are valued equally.
- Guide the process while not dominating conversation.
- Facilitators work to ensure that all participants, including themselves are integrated as genuinely as possible into the group. Facilitators balance the various dynamics and engage as both a teacher and a learner.
- Facilitation is never neutral, it is a political project. Facilitators should be able to express their thoughts and perspectives, since they are active members of the group. Attempting to take a neutral position or to remove themselves from the group is not honest and does not help the group.

III. Helpful considerations around the training

As a facilitator, your role is to guide the curriculum sessions as well as individual and group dynamics within the process. These are some helpful considerations to have a smooth and effective training.

Planning before the training:

- Outreach and follow-up with participants, including emails, phone calls, in-person meetings, informational sessions, flyers, etc.
- Schedule a time to go over the training with your co-facilitator.
- If there is no co-facilitator, consider distributing rotating roles to participants, like time-keeper, etc.
- Review curriculum, agenda, and overall goals of training.
- Choose and prepare session activities, questions, quotes, materials, resources etc.
- Think about the space for the training and what materials are needed, this could include video monitor, Internet connection, paper, pens etc.
- Create signs and wayfinding materials for the space.
- Plan and/or familiarize yourself with comfort needs like water, food, bathroom access.
- Information to know or ask about participants before the first session:
 - Personal background as it relates to the topic
 - Previous education about Palestine and the Nakba
 - Reason/motivation for participating in the session
 - Language and interpretation needs
 - Childcare needs
 - ADA accessibility of space
 - Are participants okay with being photographed during the session

During the training:

- Post wayfinding materials and set up the room to match the session needs.
- Reference the day's goals throughout each session.
- Create an atmosphere that maximizes everyone's comfort level; It's helpful to refer back to the group-generated guidelines at the beginning of each session.
- Facilitators are there to guide and direct but not dominate discussion.
- Be conscious of oppressive language (racist, sexist, homophobic, ageist, etc.) and think about ways to address and mitigate comments beforehand.
- Allow for quiet moments of reflection.
- Check in with your co-facilitator about the overall feeling, time, and needs of the group.
- Set up a system/forum for collecting thoughts, comments and responses that don't fit into the session agenda. Encourage people to use their reflection journal and create a ongoing comments or question space in the form of chart paper, suggestion box, google doc, email thread, etc.

After the training:

- Spend a few minutes debriefing yourself or with co-facilitators about what went well and what was challenging. These reflection questions can be helpful for thinking through

some of the questions or thoughts about the session(s).

- o What went well?
- o What were challenges?
- o How did particular activities work or not work for your group?
- o What alteration (additional tools, info, etc.) do you want to make for next time to address the needs of the group?
- Integrate feedback and make notes for subsequent sessions.
- Share out with the rest of the group any resources or follow-up questions that came out of the session.

V. Facilitation challenges and tools

Listed below are several facilitation challenges to consider before, while, and after conducting the sessions, along with common scenarios and helpful tips for working through them with the group.

1) Scenario: *One of the participants asserts that this is not a neutral presentation of facts; it is clearly pro-Palestine. The participant argues that the discussion does not give fair weight to the fact that the Jewish people had been persecuted and needed a homeland/had historical claim to the area. How do you respond to the fact that the curriculum is both asserting a particular position—the importance of understanding the Nakba and the principle of the right of return—and asking participants to think critically about all sides of the issue?*

Neutrality: Facing the Nakba curriculum is not neutral. This curriculum is developed out of a recognition that the education many of us have received, both formal and informal, is very pro-Israel/Zionist and tells one story about the creation of Israel. This project attempts to raise the Palestinian voice so that we can critically examine all sides of the issue. It may be helpful to ask the participant how often they have heard the Palestinian perspective of the events.

- Ask participants to keep an open mind and engage with new perspectives.
- Ask participants which viewpoint they hear most often in the news, conversations, etc. Does that make it the “right/complete” perspective?
- What other situations are they familiar with where the mainstream media does not share the full story/perspective?

2) Scenario: *During the “Found Documents” activity in Session 2, in the time allowed for questioning and challenging the groups’ positions, one participant becomes particularly adversarial toward the facilitators, accusing them of only representing the Palestinian side. It is clear that it has gone beyond a simple questioning, and the participant is now attacking the facilitators and others in the group and claiming their positions are invalid.*

New material: Everyone is learning together and each person is encountering the material from a different background. It is important to show sensitivity to the fact that worldviews may be questioned through exposure to this curriculum. Consider the likely probability that this is the first time the participant is being confronted with the Palestinian experience. Remind the participants that this activity shares a variety of perspectives of the

events. Our job is to look critically at our own understanding of the historical accounts and consider whether there are voices or perspectives that have been left out. If so, we can then reflect on how these testimonies might help us build a more inclusive understanding of both present and historical relationships in Palestine/Israel. It may also be helpful to remind participants that we often respond with a stance of disbelief or skepticism to information that conflicts with our understanding of a situation. Still, we should strive to remain as open as possible, even if the new information is difficult to accept.

- Stop the conversation before it escalates further--acknowledge the speaker's feelings and then take a break or move on to another topic.
- Refer back to the discussion guidelines created at beginning of the sessions.
- Check in with the group and the individual(s) later in the session to address the situation. Try to do so in a way that doesn't create a "us and them" scenario.

3) Scenario: *One of the participants is not talking or participating in outwardly recognizable ways. This person may generally be quiet, or is more quiet and withdrawn in relation to the sessions and particular group dynamic.*

Participation: Quiet participants may need more time to read, reflect, and process. The challenge is to incorporate their voices or thoughts without putting them on the spot. Encourage all participants to use their reflection journals and provide space for participants to post/express their thoughts or reflections throughout the sessions. This may be through an email discussion thread or through a shared google/web or written document. Emphasize that participants can always go back and spend more time reading through the materials later.

- Provide 2-3 minutes of "think time" before having people share out in a large group.
- Offer different ways of interacting with the material--journaling, discussions, drawing, etc.
- Use a variety of discussion set-ups--pairs, small groups, museum walks, etc.
- Try sharing quick responses by going all the way around the circle without anyone commenting on what each person says.

4) Scenario: *One of the participants answers or asks questions and generally takes up a lot of space in the session.*

Participation: What if the same individuals are always speaking up in the group? Utilize facilitation tools to give everyone the opportunity to contribute (small groups, going around in a circle, sharing out via post-it notes, etc.). Facilitators can appreciate the talkative individual's contribution and, at the same time, encourage others to speak by emphasizing how valuable it is to hear everyone's voice.

- If it continues to be an issue, speak privately with the talkative individual and collectively figure out a way to address the challenge.
- See tips in scenario #3 for more ideas.

5) Scenario: *While going through the Testimonies, one of the Jewish participants becomes overwhelmed by guilt. She keeps interjecting with comments of disgust and feelings of being ashamed of her culture. You acknowledge the difficulty of being faced with conflicting stories and try to move on, but she keeps bringing the focus back to her own processing.*

Difficult information: Need for facilitator to be very sensitive to the fact that people’s understanding of their personal, historical, and cultural context may be deeply challenged. Emphasize that everyone is coming from a different knowledge base with different experiences and that this is a safe space to challenge and explore what we have heard or been taught. Encourage participants that it is our job to look critically at our own understanding of the historical accounts and consider whether there are voices or perspectives that have been left out. If so, we can then reflect on how these testimonies might help us build a more inclusive understanding of both present and historical relationships in Palestine/Israel. It may also be helpful to remind participants that we often respond with a stance of disbelief or skepticism to information that conflicts with our understanding of a situation. Still, we should strive to remain as open as possible, even if the new information is difficult to accept. Encourage participants to think about what action they want to take with the new knowledge they have, rather than remaining in state of guilt or feeling overwhelmed

- Allow quiet time for reflection and encourage participants to use their reflection journal.
- Be aware and sensitive to how participants respond to each other.
- Point participants to ways they can be involved in the struggle/process, rather than remaining paralyzed by the new information.

6) Scenario: *As someone who does not have a strong background on the issues, you feel a bit unsure leading the discussion, but recognize this is an important learning experience for everyone, including you. One of the participants starts to challenge the facts shared in the historical overviews, arguing, “You don’t know what you’re talking about! You’re just presenting one side of the story!”*

Considerable information: The curriculum contains a lot of information, and there is more still. Reflection, discussion and incorporation of additional information is important in order to engage participants’ knowledge and analysis as much as possible. We invite participants to view all the information critically, including what is presented here. This is an introduction to learning about and dealing with the subject of the Nakba, and participants are invited to delve into it more deeply. Facilitators can gauge participants’ capacity to take in more information and guide participants to additional resources.

- Encourage participants to explore background information and additional resources included in bibliography.
- Acknowledge that we are all teachers and learners in this process. No one is the “expert.”

V. Additional resources

Check out PARCEO’s complete [Facilitator Training](#) and see the complete Facing the Nakba bibliography for additional background information.