

# Water in the Middle East Lesson Plan

**Overview:** In this unit, the students will discuss the vital importance, quality and availability of water in their local community. This localized discussion will act as a springboard towards approaching the topic of water in the Middle East. In preparation for this unit, the students will be assigned two major Middle Eastern water conflicts to research and address. Lastly, the students will become actors in a fictionalized water crisis that shows them how complex and contested water rights are for a community.

## **Objectives:**

Students will:

1. Consider the importance of water in their local community.
2. Research and give a presentation on historical water conflicts in the Middle East.
3. Create a mock scenario in which students engage in water diplomacy and write water legislation.

## **Activity:**

1. The unit begins with the students brainstorming and researching about water in their community. Where does the water come from? A river, lake, or an underground aquifer? What kind of purification processes must the water go through in order to be suitable for human consumption? Make the students think about water distillation, recycling and water sewage treatment. Also stress the importance of water for local agriculture and livestock. This activity helps students understand how society depends on water.
2. Split the students into two halves to research two major water conflicts in the Middle East:
  - The Israeli National Water Carrier situation with Israel and Palestinians and Syria (1965-1966);
  - The conflict over Atatürk Dam among Iraq, Syria and Turkey (1990).

Have students research the water source under dispute: Where is the water source on a map? How valuable a resource is it to the community? How much water is it? How many people depend on the water source? Who are the key players in the conflict? Why did the water conflict occur, what happened, and what were the consequences? Lastly, what was the resolution to the conflict? Now have the students present on the two water crises they have researched. Ask the class what common factors are involved in both water disputes.

3. Ask whether there are cases in which it is admissible for a society to go to war over water.  
Students participate in a mock scenario in which they engage in water diplomacy. At issue is a critical water shortage in a fictional community. The water source may be a lake or a local aquifer upon which the community depends. Divide the class into several groups, each with individual water interests. One group may

play the role of a company management team that needs to tap into a local water source for its industry. Another group may be environmental activists that want to protect the community's watershed. Other groups may represent concerned citizens, nuclear power engineers (who need water for their reactors), local fishermen and farmers. Practicing water diplomacy, the students will defend their individual group interests, debate and reach a compromise, and create water legislation that will be most beneficial to the community.