

AVOIDING ARMAGEDDON

Our Future. Our Choice.

What is Terrorism?

Grades: 7-12

Subjects: Social Studies (global studies, government), Language arts

Background: There is no single definition for terrorism. Some would argue, for example, that freedom fighters are not terrorists. There are those who believe that some extreme actions are justified; others feel that violence – especially outside of the battlefield – is never justified. This lesson helps students look at the difficult issues surrounding international terrorism. These lessons can be used alone, or in conjunction with Episode 3 of “Avoiding Armageddon” – “The New Face of Terror: Upping the Ante.”

Tools and Materials:

Paper and Pen

Access to the Internet

Activity:

- Engage students in an informal discussion about terrorism. Ask what they believe it is; when it tends to occur; and whether terrorist acts can be justified under any circumstances.
- Distribute and review with students the [Definitions of Terrorism](#).

DEFINITIONS OF TERRORISM

Some definitions and/or language to consider:

League of Nations (1937: Proposed)

All criminal acts directed against a State and intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons or a group of persons or the general public.

A. P. Schmid to United Nations Crime Branch (1992)

Act of Terrorism = Peacetime Equivalent of War Crime

UN Resolution language (1999)

1. Strongly condemns all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable, wherever and by whomsoever committed;
2. Reiterates that criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a

political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them.

FBI Definition (Revised July 2001)

Terrorism is the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.

State Department

The term "terrorism" means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant (1) targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience. The term "international terrorism" means terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than one country. The term "terrorist group" means any group practicing, or that has significant subgroups that practice, international terrorism.

United States Department of Defense

The calculated use of violence or threat of violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.

- Have students conduct additional research to identify other definitions. Based on their research of and personal understanding of terrorism, instruct students to create a definition, giving examples, where possible, of how this definition can be applied under certain circumstances.
- Instruct students to write their definitions on large index cards to post around the classroom.
- Then ask the class to review all of the definitions and then debate their variations. They should also consider the standards the international community has used for force in the past exploring both ethical and legal judgments. Through discussion, have the class come to a consensus on a definition that would be globally applicable.
- Students can submit their definitions to the United Nations, the State Department, and/or related agencies focused on terrorism.

Resources:

Memo to Congress Regarding the Definition of Terrorism
<http://www.acm.org/usacm/terrorist-memo.html>

Definition of Terrorism
<http://www.terrorismfiles.org/encyclopaedia/terrorism.html>

ABC News

http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/strike_011011definingterror.html

Exactly what is terrorism?

<http://www.csmonitor.com/specials/terrorism/lite/index.html>

The Terrorism Research Center

<http://www.terrorism.com>

The Council on Foreign Relations - Terrorism Q&A

<http://www.terrorismanswers.com/terrorism/introduction.html>

U.S. Department of State Counterterrorism Office

<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/>

FEMA-Terrorism Backgrounder

<http://www.fema.gov/old97/terror.html>

The Federal Bureau of Investigation: War on Terrorism

<http://www.fbi.gov/terrorinfo/terrorism.htm>

About the Author

From classroom instructor to an executive director, Michele Israel has been an educator for nearly 20 years. She has developed and managed innovative educational initiatives, taught in nontraditional settings in the U.S. and overseas, developed curricula and educational materials, and designed and facilitated professional development for classroom and community educators. Currently operating Educational Consulting Group, Israel is involved with diverse projects, including strategic planning and product development.