

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Israel-Syria Engage in New Peace Negotiations, 05/27/08

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/world/jan-june08/israel_5-27.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

Student Worksheet (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

- 1. Locate Israel and Syria on a map. What countries do they border?**
- 2. Who are the United States' allies in the Middle East?**
- 3. What do you know about the creation of Israel?**

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – **Student Worksheet**

- 1. What did Israel and Syria confirm recently?**

ANSWER

Israel and Syria confirmed last week that they are discussing conditions for peace between the two countries for the first time since similar negotiations broke down eight years ago.

- 2. What is Golan Heights and why is it important in the peace talks?**

ANSWER

Israel captured Golan Heights, a plateau overlooking the Syrian capital Damascus on one side and the Sea of Galilee on the other, from neighboring Syria during the Six Day War in 1967.

The latest peace talks center on Syria's demand that Israel return the Golan Heights, reported the Washington Post.

- 3. What countries did Israel seize land from during the Six Day War?**

ANSWER

Israel seized Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank of the Jordan River and East Jerusalem from Jordan.

- 4. How do Israelis feel about returning Golan Heights to Syria?**

ANSWER

But public opinion polls show that Israelis are opposed to such a move. Golan is now home to some 20,000 Jewish settlers.

Voice of America reported that 70 percent of Israelis oppose withdrawing from the Golan Heights as part of a peace agreement, with only 22 percent in favor.

5. What is Hezbollah?

ANSWER

Hezbollah, meaning the Party of God, is a political and military organization in Lebanon mainly made up of Shia Muslims. It is extremely hostile to Israel, and the United States calls Hezbollah a terrorist organization.

6. What is Hamas?

ANSWER

Hamas is the largest Islamist movement in the Palestinian territories. It is also considered a terrorist organization by the United States, and has a militant wing that carries out attacks on Israel.

7. Why do Iran and Syria have such a tight relationship?

ANSWER

Syria and Iran have had an alliance for three decades and in 2006, they signed an agreement on military cooperation.

The alliance was formed in 1980 when Syria sided with Iran in its 8-year war with neighboring Iraq -- an unpopular war among most Middle Eastern countries.

8. Is the United States enthusiastic about the peace talks?

ANSWER

The Israel-Syria talks go against the U.S. policy of limited communication with Syria.

"We hope that this is a forum to address various concerns we all have with Syria's support of terrorism, repression of its own people, and so we will see how this progresses," said White House spokeswoman Dana Perino in response to news of the talks.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. What are some of the pros and cons if Israel decides to return Golan Heights to Syria?

2. Chose to take either the role of Syria, Israel, or the mediator Turkey. What does your party hope to accomplish in these peace talks? What do you not want to give up or not want to see happen?

3. Research the international policies of presidential hopefuls Sen. John McCain and Sen. Barack Obama. What are their stances on negotiating with Syria and other Middle Eastern countries?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.