VOICE OF WITNESS

Dear educators,

Many of you have chosen to take on the important task of discussing the war in Palestine with your students. We recognize the challenge of providing clear information while holding space for your students' emotions and questions. As you continue to learn and reflect with your students, we want to offer an additional resource that centers first-person narratives to humanize this ongoing, catastrophic moment in history.

Nearly ten years ago, Voice of Witness published *Palestine Speaks: Narratives of Life Under Occupation*. The personal narratives in this collection highlight the hardships as well as the strength, joy, and resilience of Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank. In light of the continuing violence in Palestine, we developed this lesson plan featuring an excerpt from an oral history narrative in *Palestine Speaks.* This lesson's objective adheres to the Voice of Witness mission to foster a more nuanced, empathy-based understanding of contemporary human rights crises by amplifying the voices of people impacted by injustice.

We hope that this lesson will help your students investigate the important role firsthand accounts play in processing global conflict and other difficult news. Additional resources covering this topic from other organizations are available within the lesson plan. A longer unit focusing on *Palestine Speaks* is available for download on our website along with our statement calling for an immediate ceasefire and an end to Israel's occupation of Palestine.

In solidarity,
The Voice of Witness Education team

Lesson Plan: Unheard Palestinian Stories

Time Needed: One 60-minute class period.

Texts:

- TED Talk: "The Courage to Tell a Hidden Story" (video)
- Excerpt from Palestine Speaks (Nader Al-Masri)
- Palestine: A Brief Timeline (optional)

Materials:

- Letter to a Narrator (handout)

Objectives:

- Students can think critically about the role of first-person storytelling during times of crisis, and the importance of amplifying unheard voices.
- Students can make connections from first-person narratives to personal experience and prior knowledge.

Essential Question(s):

- Why are "hidden" or unheard stories important?
- What can we learn about the war in Palestine through first-person narratives?

Additional Resources:

- Zinn Education - Teaching About the Violence in Palestine and Israel
- Critical Media Literacy Rooted in Ethnic Studies – Curriculum Toolkit for Palestine
- Teach Palestine - Curriculum for K-12
- Social Justice Books - Recommended Titles for PreK-12 and Adults on Palestine
- Challenge Islamophobia - Resources and Lesson Plans
- Curriculum on Antisemitism from a Framework of Collective Liberation

VOICE OF WITNESS

Optional: Pre-Lesson Context Building
If needed, assign students to study Palestine: A Brief Timeline before class. You may choose to supplement the information on the timeline with other sources, or by asking students to share what they already know about the war in Palestine. It may be helpful to follow up by asking students where they learned this information: classroom, news, friends/family, someone with direct experience, etc. You may also ask students to draw connections between the war in Palestine and other instances in history when people have been forcibly displaced.

"The Courage to Tell a Hidden Story" Discussion (20 minutes)
This portion of the lesson requires TED Talk: "The Courage to Tell a Hidden Story". *Project the video and play for the class.* **Watch Video:** Play the 4-minute TED Talk. As they watch, prompt students to notice what new information they get from Eman's story. **Discussion:** After watching the video, lead students in a short discussion. This can be as a whole class or in small groups. Discuss the following questions: ● What were you thinking or feeling while you were listening to Eman tell her story? ● Eman's story and her photography are both examples of "hidden stories" of Palestine. What did you learn from Eman's story that you might not have learned from other sources, such as the news or fact sheets? ● What other "hidden stories" do you think might exist in Palestine? Do you think there are any "hidden stories" that exist in your school, family, community, etc.? ● What do we learn about a person or community by listening to hidden stories?
Read *Palestine Speaks* Excerpt (20 minutes)
This portion of the lesson requires the Excerpt from Palestine Speaks. Print one copy for each student to read and annotate. **Group or Independent Reading:** Give students some time to read Nader's excerpt from *Palestine Speaks.* Encourage them to highlight surprising or interesting details, and mark places where they can make connections to prior knowledge or personal experience. After reading, pause for clarifying questions. **Pair-Share:** After reading, lead students in a quick debrief of Nader's story using the following prompts: ● What was your reaction to Nader's story? What stood out or surprised you? ● In what ways is this a 'hidden story' of the war in Palestine? ● How can Nader's story help us understand more about the Palestinian experience?

Letter to the Narrator (15 min)
This portion of the lesson requires the Letter to a Narrator handout. Print one copy for each student. **Letter Writing:** Distribute handout. Read over instructions with students: *If you had a chance to speak to Nader, what would you want to say? On the lines provided, write a letter addressed to Nader about your response to his story. You can ask questions, make personal connections to your own experiences, talk about what his story has taught you, express gratitude or admiration–whatever feels most important to you! Make sure to reference at least two specific details from Nader's story in your letter.*
Exit Ticket (5 min)
To wrap up the lesson, ask students to respond to the following prompt: *What are you still chewing on after today's lesson? Write one question or thought you're having about the war in Palestine, hidden stories, or news about global conflict?*

VOICE OF WITNESS

Excerpt from Palestine Speaks

Nader Al-Masri

Semi-professional runner, 34
Born in Beit Hanoun, Gaza
Interviewed in Gaza City, Gaza

Nader Al-Masri is the only Palestinian man we interview who doesn't smoke—the absence of a cigarette in his hand is striking to us. Dressed in a faded plaid shirt, he sips a fruit cocktail as he answers our questions. Everything about Nader is neat and trim, from his chiseled face to his clipped answers during the interview. His stern, focused manner perhaps comes from the force of will it takes for him to pursue running in Gaza, a place where it's difficult to earn recognition for following a dream, much less get paid for it. With an unemployment rate approaching 40 percent, most Gazans are focused on getting by, but Nader has scraped together a way to support his family of seven while keeping up a demanding training schedule and traveling to competitions. We first interview Nader during our trip to Gaza in the spring of 2013. He explains to us why, despite the lack of support, Gaza's legendarily hot summers, difficulties traveling, and even Israeli air strikes, he has kept running.

I WAS ALWAYS FASTER THAN THE OTHER BOYS

I grew up in Gaza, in Beit Hanoun. I was always faster than the other boys. One day when I was fourteen, my teacher Saoud Hamed—he taught Arabic and sports—announced that we'd be having a foot race. That wasn't something we'd ever done before in school. I prepared for it by running whenever I could for a few days, and then I won the race easily. My teacher told me I had a special talent and offered to help me train.

Training for me took a lot of extra effort. There weren't any great places to run in Beit Hanoun or Gaza City. I didn't have good shoes. And I had to work long hours at my family's produce market a lot of the time. There were many days when I didn't have a chance to start running until the afternoon, when it could be hot, and when I was already tired from a long day.

During this whole time, my teacher Saoud was very supportive of me. He helped me train, and he also worked to get the attention of the Palestinian national running team, which was based in the West Bank. I got stronger and stronger as a runner, and then I joined the national team in 1999, at nineteen years old. I remember telling my family that I was on the national team and that I was going to travel to Ireland for a race. They didn't believe me. They asked me, "What are you talking about?" They went and asked Saoud, and he said,

"Yeah, your son made the team and we're leaving in a few days." My family was shocked that this was something I could actually do with my life.

In Ireland, I saw a very different life than the one I knew in Gaza. People there had so much, there were times I felt like what we had back in Gaza couldn't even be called "life." But one of my best memories from Ireland was just meeting the other runners on the Palestine national team, getting a chance to talk about shared experiences. I'd never met them before, since I'd never had the chance to travel to the West Bank, and there weren't any other members of the team from Gaza.

I'VE ONLY BEEN TO THE WEST BANK ONCE

In the past thirteen years since I joined the national team, I've been to twenty-five countries, but I've only been to the West Bank once. That was in 2008, when I had to cross to Jordan. It wasn't easy. It took seven months for me to get the permit to travel through Jordan. It was because of the media, because I got many interviews with Israeli TV channels and newspapers. At the end of the day, the Israeli government gave me the permit.

I've never been to Bethlehem or Jerusalem. It would have been my first time. Even if I get a permit to the West Bank, I won't get a permit to Jerusalem this year because of my age. The Israelis only give permits to men older than thirty-five to travel to Jerusalem, because they see young men from Gaza as too dangerous to even consider allowing in the city.

IT GIVES ME THE SENSE OF BEING FREE

I'm married with five kids—four girls and one boy. I was married to my wife Sawsan in 2007, and I supported my family for a time as a security officer with the Palestinian Authority. But after Hamas took over shortly after I got married, they drove the PA out of Gaza and I was left without any job. Still, I continue to be paid by the PA, which is true of many Gazans who had worked for the Palestinian Authority. I'm paid around $500 per month.

Soccer players are sponsored and supported by the government and the Palestinian Authority more than runners. I feel isolated because I am not supported and I don't have facilities. So I'm training so I can participate in international competitions and make money. I can't make money until I reach this goal. But becoming better with the facilities I have available here in Gaza is difficult.

I want to get first place when I run and show that Palestinians have something to be proud of. I'm proud to be representing Palestine, no matter how hard it is for me to keep training. When I go to represent Palestine in championships, I try to focus on the idea that

Palestinians are a peaceful people. And I draw attention to the fact that we can't move around easily because we don't have an airport and we have to go through Egypt to travel, and not even that is reliable.

Unfortunately, not many Gazans know about what I've done as a runner. Usually, when you say you are on the official team of your country, it means something, but here there isn't much appreciation of that sort of achievement. There was a movie I saw about a runner who died, and as the ambulance pulled away, people were clapping like he was something great. But in Gaza, if I died while I was in the middle of a training run, probably nobody on the street would notice. I've thought of quitting many times because of the lack of support, but running is still the thing I want to do at the end of the day.

I also keep running because it basically means freedom to me. I run on my own. I go wherever I want, do whatever I want, and it gives me the sense of being free. The second I start running, I feel free to fly and go wherever I want. When I was young, before I had a family, I'd even run when there was an Israeli invasion or bombing in Gaza City. Today, I stay with my family when anything like that happens. But whenever I feel stressed out by everything that's happening here, I can still leave the city and go running in the country, where there's nobody else in sight, and it gives me the feeling of being free.

VOICE OF WITNESS

Letter to a Narrator

If you had a chance to speak to Nader, what would you want to say? On the lines provided, write a letter addressed to Nader about your response to his story. You can ask questions, make personal connections to your own experiences, talk about what his story has taught you, express gratitude or admiration–whatever feels most important to you! Make sure to reference at least two specific details from Nader's story in your letter.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

VOICE OF WITNESS

Palestine: A Brief Timeline

- **1516:** The Ottomans capture Palestine and the Levant.
- **1703–1705:** The Naqib al-Ashraf Rebellion against Ottoman rule.
- **1825–1826:** Tax revolt in Jerusalem.
- **1882–1903:** First wave of European Jewish immigration to Palestine.
- **May, 1916:** The Sykes-Picot Agreement, a secret agreement dividing the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire between Great Britain and France.
- **October 1917–October 1918:** British forces take Palestine from the Ottomans (beginning of the British Mandate).
- **April 1936–August 1939:** The Great Arab Revolt.
- **September 1947:** The British announce the mandate will end at midnight, May 14, 1948, handing over the matter to the UN.
- **January 1948:** The Nakba ("catastrophe" in Arabic, referring to the mass and violent displacement and dispossession of the Palestinian people).
- **June 1967:** The Naksa ("setback" in Arabic, referring to the forced migration of up to 325,000 Palestinians).
- **September 1982:** The Sabra and Shatila Massacres are carried out in Lebanon.
- **December 1987:** The first Intifada ("uprising" in Arabic) begins.
- **August 1993:** The Oslo Accords, establishment of the Palestine Authority (PA).
- **September 2000:** The second Intifada (the Aqsa Intifada) begins.
- **June 2007:** The Hamas party takes over the Gaza Strip from the Fatah party; Israel imposes a blockade on Gaza.
- **December 2008–January 2009:** War on Gaza ("Operation Case Lead," twenty-two days).
- **November 2012:** Assault on Gaza ("Operation Pillar of Defense," eight days).

- **July–August 2014:** War on Gaza ("Operation Protective Edge," fifty days).

- **May 2021:** Israeli police raid al-Asqa Mosque. Subsequent fighting kills more than 200 people.

- **April 2022:** Israel launches "Break the Wave" military operation in response to Palestinian attacks.

- **January 2023:** Israel raids the Palestinian city of Jenin and retaliatory attacks continue through the summer.

- **October 2023:** Hamas launches an attack on Israel, killing over 1,400 Israeli citizens, and Israel formally declares war. The ongoing war has led to the killing of more than 15,000 Palestinians so far.