

Teaching Balfour

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Why was the Balfour Declaration an important document in 1917?

It was a major Zionist breakthrough. It was the first "legal" recognition by a governmental body that the Jewish people had an ancient connection to the land of Israel and a right to return to their ancestral home.

- 2) Is the Balfour Declaration still important? Why should we acknowledge it?

This document should be celebrated. Just as Theodore Herzl is a hero for speaking out on the need for the Jewish people to return and rebuild their homeland, the Balfour Document reaffirmed for all the world that Israel belongs to the Jewish people.

- 3) If the Balfour Declaration declared the Jewish people had a right to land but offered us a different geographical region would that have been just as satisfactory?

No, absolutely not. Israel is not just about the Jewish people gathering in one place to live. It is about the rebirth of our ancient Homeland. God told Abraham, "Go to the land that I give you, for you and your children and your children's children." Moses was told by God to lead us to the Promised Land, the land of Israel. For over four thousand years the land of Israel has been an integral part of the Jewish people. For the two thousand years that we were in exile there was a constant yearning to return home.

4) Who were the Jewish leaders that played a role in securing this document?

Lord Rothschild and Chaim Weizmann.

5) Why were they driven to see this document created?

Lord Rothschild and Chaim Weizmann knew the history of the Jewish people. They understood our rightful claim to the land and they knew that the Jewish people were scattered all over the world. They wanted Israel to serve as a "home base" for our people. They wanted us to see Herzl's dream of rebuilding the land come to life.

Activities

1. Write a diary entry for Chaim Weizmann from the night before he is scheduled to meet with Lord Balfour to discuss the wording of the declaration. What thoughts do you think were running through his head? Do you think he was nervous? Why? What do you think he might have told himself to stay calm and confident?
2. Group students into partners, have 1 student play Lord Balfour and the other Lord Rothschild. Have them role play the conversation when Lord Balfour presents the declaration. Afterward have students share what they said to each other.

3. Write a newspaper article about the Balfour Declaration. Give background on why it is important and the general purpose of the declaration.
4. Pretend you are at the meeting where Lord Rothschild presents the Balfour Declaration to the Jewish Federation. "Live Tweet" the meeting as you think it happened.
5. Write a "thank you" note to Lord Rothschild, Chaim Weizmann, or Lord Balfour. Think about whether or not you have benefitted from their actions. As a student living almost one hundred years later do we owe them a debt of gratitude?
6. Hold a debate. You can have Team Weizmann & Rothschild vs. Team Balfour. What are their views? Who does each team represent? (The Jewish people vs. the British government). Have each team research background information on the situation in 1917. This can be a large group activity.
7. Hold a contest where students create posters explaining the meaning of the Balfour Declaration. They can include key information such as the year it was written, the geographical area it effected and names of the main leaders. This can be a large group activity.