

Recognizing Israel (Torah Scroll)

Background:

Even before World War II, Jewish people in Europe had been persecuted and treated unfairly for centuries. Once World War II began, their suffering worsened. Motivated by false beliefs, Germany's leader, Adolf Hitler, and other members of the German Nazi party organized the deaths of millions of European Jews and caused others to be homeless. For years, many Jewish people had wanted a country of their own. WWII caused the need for a Jewish homeland to grow even stronger. In May 1948, the state of Israel declared independence and established a new home for Jews. This angered Arabs in the area because they believed Israel and the Jews were wrongly intruding on their land. The same day, President Harry S. Truman recognized Israel's independence, a tough decision that excited some people and angered others.

Standard:

3.4.TS.7.B.a With guidance and support, use visual tools and informational texts to interpret, draw conclusions, make predictions, and communicate information and ideas.

C3.ELA.2.c: Develop and apply skills and strategies to comprehend, analyze, and evaluate nonfiction: use information gained from illustrations and words to demonstrate understanding of the text

Vocabulary:

Jews- a religious group that trace themselves back to Jesus Christ

Torah- the law of God and the most important text in the Jewish faith

Israel- a country that several religious groups, including Jews and Muslims, view as the Holy Land

Persecution- unfair treatment because of race, religious, or political beliefs

Arabs- an ethnic group of people that mostly practice the Muslim faith and live in the area surrounding

Bar/Bat Mitzvah - a Jewish ceremony to recognize when boys (13) and girls (12) get all rights and obligations of a Jewish adult.

Materials Needed:

Truman Torah picture

Truman Torah story

Truman Torah Worksheet

pencil

Video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tK1mCfADwJ4&feature=youtu.be>

Procedure:

1. Discuss background information with the class

2. Define Jews, Torah, Israel, Persecution, and Arabs
3. Observe the Torah Scroll
4. Read the story behind the Torah Scroll
5. Conclusion - video

Assessment: Students will use the image and story about the Torah Scroll to draw conclusions, make predictions, and communicate information and ideas when completing worksheet.

As a thank-you for recognizing Israel's independence, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, Israel's first president, gifted this Torah Scroll and Torah Pointer to President Truman in the Rose Garden of the White House on May 25, 1948.

The Truman Torah

Although Truman decided to recognize Israel almost immediately, it was not an easy decision.

People like Secretary of State George Marshall told President Harry Truman not to recognize Israel because it would anger Arabs that also lived in the area. Angering the Arabs could prevent the US from accessing oil in their lands. On the other hand, Truman had people like his best friend, Eddie Jacobson, putting pressure on him to recognize Israel. Truman knew that recognizing Israel would help him gain support from Jewish voters. This was especially important because Truman was seeking reelection in 1948. Truman frequently read the Bible and interpreted it as literal history.

Because of this, Truman also felt morally compelled to recognize Israel and sympathized with the suffering of the Jewish people.

On May 14, 1948, Israel declared independence. That same day, Truman and the United States recognized Israel as an independent country. The United States was a global superpower after World War II and became the first country to recognize Israel. This was significant because it pressured other countries to do the same.

In the following weeks, Truman invited the first president of Israel, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, to visit the White House. Weizmann received the invitation on a



Sunday. The meeting was set to take place the next day, on Monday. Weizmann understood how important it was for the US to recognize Israel and the risks Truman took to make it happen. Weizmann wanted to make sure that he showed Truman proper thanks. Usually, this meant giving a meaningful gift. However, since Weizmann had less than a day's notice, he did not have a proper gift to give to Truman. Unsure of what to do, Weizmann called Louis Finkelstein, Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and asked if he could provide a gift that he could present to President Truman. Finkelstein replied that the seminary's items were not his to give away.

Finkelstein instead offered Weizmann a Torah scroll that he had recently given his own younger son for his bar mitzvah (an important Jewish event/celebration that represents a boy's transition into manhood). Weizmann accepted and presented the Torah scroll to Truman the next day. Finkelstein explained to his son that his Torah scroll had been given away to the president of Israel, who had then given the scroll to President Truman. His son later explained that he did not understand the importance of the whole ordeal until he saw a picture of his Torah scroll on the front page of the New York Times. Truman deeply valued the Torah and viewed Israel as one of the most important decisions he made in his life. The Truman Torah continues to represent the friendship and alliance between the United States and Israel.

Truman Torah Worksheet

1. Who gave the Torah scroll to President Truman?

2. Why did they give the scroll to Truman?

3. What does the Torah scroll represent?

4. Where did the Torah scroll come from?

5. Why did Truman recognize Israel?

6. Why did some people not want Truman to recognize Israel?

7. Why was it important for Truman to recognize Israel?

Conclusion:

In January 2020, the now 92-year-old rabbi was reunited with the Torah in a ceremony marking the 80th anniversary of his bar mitzvah. In the following video, Finkelstein reflects on the first four months of Truman's presidency, his WWII service, and what it means to him to have had his Torah gifted to President Truman. Watch video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tK1mCfADwJ4&feature=youtu.be>