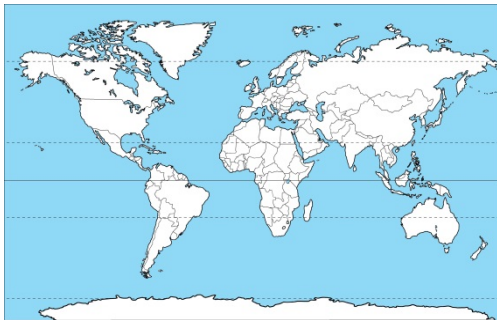


### Teaching controversial issues through enquiry learning in senior secondary History

Ms Cheng Ling Ling, the panel chairperson of History of **Yan Chai Hospital Wong Wha San Secondary School**, uses enquiry learning to teach a controversial topic in senior secondary History: “The Reasons behind Ethnic Conflicts between Israelis and Arabs”.

#### Understanding students’ prior knowledge and preparing them to learn

Ms Cheng has found that students generally lack in-depth understanding of the history of the Middle East and the cultural background between the Israelis and Arabs. Some students do not even know the geographical location of the Middle East. Ms Cheng uses the concept map below to let students choose to use text or pictures to express their impressions and understanding of the Middle East in order to gauge how much background knowledge students have already grasped. In the process, Ms Cheng reminds students that “Middle East” is a term with Europe-centric view and clarifies misunderstandings. This is to prepare students for the subsequent learning of the topic.

<p>Middle East countries that believe in Islam</p>	<p>History/cultural incidents/figures/things related to the Middle East</p>
<p>Middle East countries that believe in other religions</p>	<p>Where is the Middle East?</p> 

### **Diversified learning activities and learning and teaching resources**

Ms Cheng designs a wide range of learning activities based on students' interests and abilities, incorporating various kinds of learning and teaching resources so that students can engage in enquiry with sufficient knowledge. For example, she selects news reports and commentaries from media from different countries and regions (such as Hong Kong, the Mainland, Europe and the US) regarding the conflicts between Israel and the Arabs for students to understand how the history of the Middle East region is closely related to the international situation today, and to understand that different media may hold different positions and views. This allows students to understand the complexity of the conflicts between Israel and the Arabs. Ms Cheng also plays videos to help students grasp the basic content of the topic, and guides them through questioning to further understand the complexity and controversies associated with the topic (refer to Activity 1 for details).

When students have attained some understanding of the topic, Ms Cheng provides them with opportunities and space for enquiry using different learning activities and reading materials, such as role play, group discussion and class discussion. These activities allow students to progressively construct personal positions and views on the incidents based on opinions and rationales of various stakeholders (refer to Activities 2 to 4 for details).

### **Teacher's roles in enquiry learning**

In the design and practice of enquiry learning, Ms Cheng particularly emphasises the following aspects:

- Provide basic knowledge of the topic before students engage in enquiry activities;
- Provide students with opportunities and space for enquiry through a wide range of learning activities and learning and teaching resources;
- Create an open atmosphere in the classroom as there are extensive peer interactions during enquiry activities, and remind students to be open-minded toward others' opinions and values, embrace and accept those with different opinions and have exchanges and discussions with open and rational attitudes; and
- Explain or ask questions at the right moments, not only to highlight key points and clarify misunderstandings, but also to enhance the depth and width of the enquiry.

## Reference materials for classroom activities

### Activity 1: Playing a Video: “Creating a Future: Saying Goodbye to Peace”

This is a TV program produced by RTHK in the Middle East. The production team explores the conflicts between people and their desire for peace by reporting the clashes between the Israelis and the Arabs. Reporters visited the places where the Arabs and Israelis lived and asked the inhabitants about their feelings, thus bringing out the reasons behind the conflicts.

The reasons for choosing this video are as follows:

- To provide authentic context to help students more easily adopt the roles of Israelis and Arabs living in Palestine and think about the reasons why the two groups are so persistent in their fight over territory; and
- To provide genuine views for students to develop a deeper understanding of the views and positions of Israelis and Arabs living in the Palestinian region toward each other.

After watching the video, ask the students the following questions to stimulate thinking.

- Why is there hatred between the two groups?
- What do the Israelis want? How do they view the Arabs? How do they describe their relationship with the Arabs now?
- What is the desire of the Arabs? What do the Arabs want? How do they view the Israelis? How do they describe their relationship with the Israelis now?
- Can both sides live in harmony?
- How would you feel if you lived in the Palestinian region?

### Activity 2: Who has sovereignty over the Palestinian territory?

Content: In groups of two, one student represents the Israelis and the other the Arabs. Ask them to read the materials first and then let the two sides explain the reasons why they have sovereignty over Palestine.

Purpose: To allow students to listen to each other’s views on sovereignty over Palestine and then determine whether the rationales of the two groups are reasonable.

**Activity 3: Is the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine (1947) reasonable?**

Contents: Role-playing. Students first read the materials according to the roles assigned to them and then engage in the group activity.

Roles	Tasks
UN Representative:	Write down the concepts of the Partition Plan
Arab Representative:	Write down the reasons behind the discontent toward the Partition Plan and what actions are to be taken to express this discontent
Israeli Representative:	Write down the views on the Partition Plan and the development of Israel after its establishment as a state
UK-US Representative(s):	Write down the reasons why Western countries interfere with affairs in the Middle East

Purpose: To enable students to understand why the United Nations has proposed a Partition Plan for Palestine, the positions and views of the international community and the two groups on the Partition Plan and the difficulties in dealing with ethnic conflicts.

Teacher's Role: Invite some students to report, conduct class discussions and explain different stakeholders' attitudes towards and evaluations of the Partition Plan, thus bringing out how the United Nations Partition Plan became the reason the Arabs initiated the first Arab-Israeli War.

**Activity 4: Referendum**

Content: The whole class engages in a voting activity based on the following question: "Do you agree on the United Nations Partition Plan?" Students vote by raising their hands to express their views on the United Nations Partition Plan and offer support for their views.

Purpose: To allow students to judge how the Partition Plan led to escalating conflicts between the two groups.

Teacher's Role: Encourage students to think further about how they would allocate the land if they were representatives of the United Nations.

The above example has demonstrated that students' prior knowledge, diverse learning activities, learning and teaching resources and the teacher's roles are keys to enquiry learning.

If you are interested in enquiry learning, read also Examples 28 and 29.